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CHAPTER XLIX.

NEXT day the court was, if possible, more crowded than on the previous one. It was a fine spectacle. In truth, if you could have divested yourself of the knowledge that a fellow-creature was sitting there, enduring—whether guilty or innocent—a very slow, exquisite, and refined species of torture, it was enjoyable. For one thing, it was an intellectual wrestling-match played out before the three kingdoms ; and, months after, the solitary squatter in the Australian bush, and the little households spotted over the land below the genial skies of New Zealand, would hang over its details, and sharpen their rusting mental powers watching it. It was a tragic drama, the interest attaching to which was different from that of ordinary dramas, as the game is that is played for an immense stake, compared with the game that is played for no stake at all. And, say as you like, a

When the prosecutor for the crown began his speech, you might, as the reporters phrased it, have heard a pin fall. He took up the points of evidence, one by one, and made a most consistent whole of them ; consistent, that is, on the supposition of the prisoner's guilt. That he proved almost to a demonstration.

“It only wanted,” he said, “that some one had seen her shake the powder into that fatal basin ; but it was very rare, in these days of advanced civilisation, that the murderer was caught red-handed. Where poison was the weapon, it was hardly possible ; the ease and secrecy with which it could be used had precluded that, and made this method of crime the horror of all ages. He dwelt on the medical evidence, which made it certain that Miss Boston had died of poison, and rejected suicide or accident as being wholly untenable. There were others in that house besides the prisoner, but of none of these was it even

alleged that arsenic had ever been in their possession. But it was in hers; she had used it for killing mice, and had had it for years. She might have had it for twenty years. A man might have a dagger at his hand for twenty years, but he only used it when the temptation came. She carried this poison from Ironburgh to Blindpits, the explanation being that it got into her bag by mistake. That is possible," he said, "it is possible, but is it likely that a lady, an elderly lady—an elderly single lady of known methodical habits—should carry a packet of rank poison about with her, not knowing she had it? When she saw such serious illness set in, does she send off at once for medical aid? She does no such thing. For her own ends she dilly-dallies till it is too late. Then her haste—he might say her indecent haste—to leave the house of her old friend the moment almost after her death. True, a witness had told them he advised her to do so. It was a lucky piece of advice that, jumping so exactly with her own inclination and plans. We may think it unlikely, he went on, that a lady of her education and social standing should commit such an atrocious crime. It was unlikely; for

the credit of human nature, he was glad to say that it was very unlikely. He hoped women were scarce in any station who could watch with every appearance of devoted kindness by the sickbed of a friend—of an aged friend, who leant on them in the hour of weakness, and take advantage of that trust to extinguish the feeble remnant of life in agonising pain. This, the evidence drove him up to say, the prisoner had done. Nor was the motive far to seek. She was in want of money; she knew the favourable terms of her victim's will; and she had also discovered £200 of money ready to her hand in the house. She did the deed, and she took that money. A gentleman has told us that Miss Boston sent to him for that money, saying she meant to give it to a young friend. Was the prisoner at the bar that young friend? He thought any affectation of gallantry at such a moment out of the question. The prisoner was not young; she was a middle-aged woman, who had been pushing her own way for a score of years and more. Moreover, Miss Boston had no idea, no expectation, of a visit from her. On the contrary, she understood she was not to have a visit from her at that time; and we have been



told she uttered an exclamation of surprise when she saw her. Surely, if that money had been intended for her, it would have been sent to her by the hand of her niece, who returned to Ironburgh on the very day she arrived so unexpectedly at Blindpits ; or, if Miss Boston had meant to forward it by post, she would have got it in the form of a cheque. Turn which way we will, everything, great and small, goes to prove the certainty of the prisoner's guilt," etc.

That is a feeble echo of a speech which occupied three hours in delivery, and was generally characterised, and justly so, as very eloquent.

It would be difficult to depict Barbara's state of mind, as she gazed at the speaker, and heard what he said. She perceived how strong the case was against her. However, that did not make her tremble ; but when she heard Miss Boston's painful death vividly depicted, and recalled the scene—her old friend's great suffering, and strong-minded self-control through it all—and thought, if she had only taken the matter in her own hands, and got a doctor sooner, it was possible she might have been saved—her head dropped on her hand, and she shed tears. This was the only

time throughout the trial that she faltered, and it was duly observed, and ascribed to a very different cause. When she heard herself held up as a criminal of no ordinary dye ; driven to bay, the timidity of the woman, and the strong sense of propriety of the governess, had nearly given way, and she was on the verge of standing up and pleading her own cause ; but she succeeded in keeping down her excitement, and sat on with at least the appearance of composure.

The speech for the defence came next, and the eagerness to hear it was intense. What could the prisoner's counsel possibly say ? He could not attempt to demolish the evidence, surely ? What Mr. Armstrong had set himself to do, was to throw doubt into the mind of the jury. If he could show that it was possible the crime might have been committed by some other person or persons, he felt he would gain his cause so far as saving the prisoner's life was concerned. He admitted death had been the result of poison ; that the prisoner had had poison in her possession ; that she, and she only, had prepared and given the deceased lady the food that had been fatal—he admitted all that. He excelled his predecessor in

depicting the frightful atrocity of the crime, supposing it to have been committed by the prisoner. She and her victim were of the same blood ; they had been life-long friends ; perfect trust was between them. In the deep gloom of a winter morning—gloom fitted for the contemplation of such a deed—she sets off, her weapon in her hand. She is warmly welcomed and kindly entreated by the old lady. The helplessness of old age is affecting even to a stranger ; but this woman is unmoved. She never wavers. When illness attacks her hostess she becomes the devoted nurse ; but her nature is harder than the nether millstone. At one time she might think she would be saved the risk attending crime by the opportune death of her oldest friend ; but recovery setting in, that hope fails her, and she determines to extinguish the flickering life, to shorten the last days of her helpless relative by a death of acute suffering. If she did this—I say if she did all this——

“I did not do it,” burst from Barbara’s lips, in one loud cry that pierced the farthest corner of the building, and then she sank in her seat overpowered by excitement.

The effect was electrical. The previous deep silence was broken by a hundred voices, cheering was heard, and decorum was only restored by a threat of clearing the court.

That impassioned cry carried conviction of the prisoner's innocence to many minds, but the far-seeing people—and the reader's circle is limited if he has not met with some of them—the far-seeing people said that this little scene had been arranged between the prisoner and her counsel; nay, that they had practised it together; that he had got up his climax for the purpose, and that the repetition of his last words, "If she did this," was the signal agreed upon between them when she was to let loose her cry.

Mr. Armstrong saw to the full the advantage gained by this unusual burst of feeling, and he did not draw out his speech to such a length as to weaken its effects. He went on to say that sudden atrocity displayed by a person whose previous life had been such as the prisoner's had been proved to have been, was unknown, indeed was impossible. Why not accept her explanation? The simplicity of her account had the ring of truth in it, and was to

his mind thoroughly satisfactory. She took the arsenic to Blindpits by mistake, and did not know of the mistake till she was home again. It was evident, if she did know of it, that she did not tell any one, and if she had used it as she was accused of doing, it was as evident that she would not say to any one, "I have arsenic in my bag." Then how was it known that she had arsenic in that bag? for it was known—it was known almost immediately at Heatherburgh. He had seen a letter when the investigation was in its first stage. He had seen a letter from a gentleman in Heatherburgh to a friend at Ironburgh, stating that it was known, and could be proved, that she had arsenic with her in that bag. How was it known? He would have liked that that had been fully brought out. He wished to accuse no one, and far less did the prisoner at the bar wish to do so. They had heard yesterday how a closed letter could be easily and neatly opened, perused, and shut up again. He begged to ask if the person who betrayed trust in that way was likely to refrain from peeping into a bag if she had the opportunity. Was it not all but certain that she would do so—that she

would examine its contents? Far be it from him to say that all persons of a prying inquisitive nature, who descended to base shifts to gratify their mean curiosity, were ready to commit murder; but was it not possible that the person who looked into that bag might possess herself of a portion of the fatal powder? She had been in the kitchen while the saucepan containing the soup was on the fire, for three, four, or five minutes. A friend was with her, but that friend might be aiding and abetting, or he might be entirely oblivious, or he might see her seasoning the soup, as he thought, and forget such a trivial circumstance entirely. I am far from saying that she did that, but I say that it is possible, that it is at least as possible as that the prisoner at the bar did it. She might know that £40 accrued to her on Miss Boston's demise, and that sum was as much to her as larger ones to other people. And as to the gift of money, it had been alleged that that statement bore falsehood on the face of it, because Miss Boston had intended it for a "young friend." The crown had spoken of gallantry—he would speak of common sense and the experience of human nature.



Was it unlikely, was it not rather most likely and natural, that a woman upon the verge of eighty should speak of another, not quite forty, as young? He believed the venerable father of the crown-advocate was still living. Did he address his son as his old friend, or did his son at forty consider himself an old man, and point out to his father his mistake in speaking of him as young? He himself found it impossible to believe in the prisoner's guilt, and he was sure the jury would find it equally incredible. This again is the echo of another very eloquent speech.

It was now the business of the presiding judge to give a dispassionate digest of the whole evidence—to hold the scales of justice evenly, and see that there were no false weights in either; but do as he might he could not help throwing the weight of his opinion and feelings into what threatened to be the lighter one. As customary, he impressed upon the jury—and most earnestly he did it—that if they had any doubt they were to give the prisoner the benefit of that doubt.

The jury retired, and that was the signal for a general relaxation of the fixed still attention of the

her eyes, and, strange as it may seem, for a few seconds she actually slept and dreamed. She dreamed she was in the house she had lived in as a child ; she had gone out into the park before the house, and was walking along a little narrow footpath, the very stones of which she saw and remembered, when suddenly she met her father. The bright smile of these prosperous days was on his face, his cheery familiar voice said, " Barbara, where are you going ?" and the effort to answer him roused her and brought back upon her in full flood the reality of her position, which was far liker a dream than the other—a horrible dream, fiendish and fantastic.

The jury took time to consider their verdict. How far human beings can keep free of bias it would be difficult to say. It is possible that had the prisoner been a man, or the penalty something short of death, the verdict might have been different. Mr. Goldie and another conscientiously believed in her innocence,

and argued hard for a verdict of not guilty, on the ground that it was much easier to believe that death was the result of accident or the crime of another, than that a lady whose whole life had been even more than usually consistent and praiseworthy, should suddenly commit such an aggravated crime. But the others thought there was no getting over the evidence ; however, as another person had, almost to a certainty, had access to the poison, they agreed to a verdict of "Not proven," and amidst the breathless hush of the court that verdict was pronounced, and the prisoner set free.

The cheering, begun in various parts of the house, was not taken up. Probably most of the people there were thankful that the prisoner had escaped a ghastly doom, but the impression was general that she did not leave the court with clean hands. Some newspapers did not hesitate to charge the jury with imbecility, and asked if the prisoner was to escape, who could consider himself safe ?

CHAPTER L.

AND Barbara went home—bruised and bleeding she went home. Miss Dobbie, with her queer and enviable lightheartedness, had busied herself getting ready an elegant little supper to crown and celebrate the triumph she was so confident of. She sat at the head of the festive board, and gaily pressed and smiled, but it would not do. Barbara could not touch food. All she could swallow was a glass of water. She sat, however, with a smile on her face—truly a wooden smile—and said she would be able to eat and drink to-morrow. Graham and Mr. Dods, who had been in the court all day, brought her home; but they had left very shortly, supposing, in the circumstances, the family would prefer being alone. As for Mr. Grant, he had left the court the instant the verdict was given, and hurried to Berwick

Street with the news ; but Bessie and he agreed that it was better he should be absent till Miss Barclay was disabused of her strange misconception concerning him, and he had gone away accordingly before she arrived.

At the age of threescore we don't expect a nature to change, or if we do it is very likely we shall be disappointed. Mrs. Barclay had not been her own chief object during life to begin to forget herself now. "To think," she burst forth after an interval spent in watching Barbara, "that my daughter should have been taken out of my house, cast into a common jail, tried in a criminal court, and sent back to me branded—branded for life by such a verdict ! We were beggars before, but at least we had peace and obscurity to doze out our lives in."

Barbara leant back on her chair. "Mother!" she said, and a shudder ran through her, "Mother, let me try to be thankful that I have escaped with my life."

"O aunt—grandmamma—don't speak of it—don't think of it, it has been a terrible mistake, but let us forget it. Other people will soon forget it ; and if

we forget it, it will be the same as if it had never been."

"Bessie, my dear," said Miss Dobbie, "I don't exactly see how that can be. Your aunt has quite a remarkable memory for events and dates. For my part, I never could remember a date but 1688, owing to there being two eights in it, I suppose, which make sixteen too. But we need not forget, as I have repeatedly said, we have nothing to be ashamed of. I'm sure if the thing had not happened, I would have said nobody did it."

A low cry, as of pain, escaped from Barbara's lips, and Bessie had just time to prevent her falling, when, for the first time in her life, she fainted. Bravely she had borne up against her imprisonment, and braced herself for her trial; but, the great strain over, she could bear no more. Miss Dobbie's well-meant tattle filled her cup of suffering to overflow. She did not, however, lie for weeks unconscious in the delirium of fever; that might have been, at such a time, a blessed kind of oblivion; but she had no fever, or other bodily illness, and so strong was her sense of duty, and her habit of doing it, that she



rose next day and set about the business of life as if there had been no interruption.

Bessie looked on with a species of awe at her matter-of-fact aunt as she took stock of household affairs. It would hardly have struck her more if one had risen from the dead to look out their few articles of plate, and sit down calmly to polish them, than to see her aunt do it. Consumed with the desire of vindicating Mr. Grant, and bringing together again the two people she loved most in the world, she dared not try to do it yet; and while she restlessly moved about the house in a perfect fever of conflicting feeling, and every newspaper in the country was making either an innocent heroine or a guilty one of Barbara, there the object of their sympathy or wrath was sitting with a leather-duster rubbing up the old spoons that had grown brown in her absence.

But though Barbara did not, and indeed could not, sit down in idleness to bewail her fate, not the less keenly did she feel it,—not merely the vulgar curiosity that caused people to stop and stare at and point out the house, and made it an impossibility that she should go out except in the shelter of a

carriage—not that which she had counted on—but not one of her late pupils came near her, or their parents. She tried to excuse them. Their conduct was natural, perhaps, but it was hard to bear. And while she bore all this misery, this obloquy, this desertion, the very name of the real criminal was unbreathed upon—he walked about in honour and prosperity. Such were the thoughts that burned themselves into her about Mr. Grant, as Bessie, all unconscious, watched an opportunity to introduce his name.

When the jury walked into court that day with their verdict, Graham's heart almost stood still in mortal anxiety as to Miss Barclay's fate. He believed her innocent, but if, not knowing her, he had been on the jury, he almost felt as if he could not have seen his way past the evidence; consequently the verdict neither acquitting nor condemning her, but setting her at all events free, gave him unbounded relief. Mr. Dods and he shook hands and covered their faces with their handkerchiefs. When they left Barbara in her own home, Mr. Dods would have liked to have drawn Graham into the kitchen, to discuss with him-



self and Mrs. Dods the possibility of Bell Gibson's guilt and Pettigrew's complicity, but Graham went direct to his own room.

He flung himself on the sofa ; he was very wearied, but very glad. The witchery of Bessie's eyes gleamed on him again, and they fell under his gaze once more. He might now speak of his love. He had forgotten Sara Anderson, or if he thought of that passage of his life, it was to smile at its boyish absurdity. He envied the dull wall that stood between him and Bessie. He wondered if her tongue was wagging as merrily as it once did. Of late she had been rather silent, but then a woman does not rattle away like a child. He turned over the question of ways and means ; these were positively *nil* till he should get a situation, but it was not in the power of such a consideration to damp his happiness. He knew nothing of Bessie's legacy. You have seen the delicate web of a spider suspended between the forked twigs of a bush, the subtle threads besprent with dew which the sun makes diamonds of ; surely the queen of the fairies has hung her embroidered mantle there, for it is unearthly in its beauty. What will become of it,

left there exposed to every accident? You go back in an hour, and it's gone—lace, diamonds, workmanship, beauty, all gone; torn, trampled on, blown to the winds; that's a picture of Graham's happiness.

Mr. Pettigrew was alone in his chamber also. His love, or plan rather, was also in ruins. What a pit he had escaped in taking time to consider before he had actually put himself in Miss Barclay's power to marry! But he was crushed in some measure by the turn affairs had taken. Could he believe his ears when he heard it broadly insinuated, and more, that he, Peter Pettigrew, had been aiding and abetting a foul murder? But that on principle he avoided the law, he would have sued that man for libel. The very notion of being concerned in a murder made him feel that he would rather be in company than alone, so he went to the kitchen, and without invitation took a chair and sat down.

"Well, Mrs. Dods," he said, "you'll be pleased with the result of this day's proceedings, I think?"

"Ye're wrang then. What's the use o' settin' a dog loose wi' a pan tied to its tail?"

"What other verdict could they hae gi'en,



woman?" said Mr. Dods. "It is a wise provision o' the Scotch law, which allows"—

"Dinna tell me about wise provisions; either she did it, or she didna do it. The Almighty set a mark on Cain, but it doesna follow that the Scotch law had ony business to set a mark on Miss Barclay."

"Ye ken naething about it," thought Mr. Dods.

"The verdict ought to have been guilty," said Peter; "and there might have been a recommendation to mercy on the ground of previous good character."

"Weel, she never lookit into other folk's letters, at ony rate," said Mr. Dods.

"Ay, Peter," said his landlady, "they turned you inside out yesterday; however, I think opening letters is mair in your line than committing murder. I dinna think ye had to do wi' it mair than Miss Barclay."

"Who had to do with it, Mrs. Dods?"

"That's to be seen yet, Peter. It's a kittle business as ever I heard tell o'; as Miss Dobbie aye says, puir body!—' If it hadna been done, I wad hae said naebody did it.'"

But it had been done, and Miss Barclay was the

scapegoat upon whom the sin rested; and common opinion said she should bear it away into the wilderness—go into exile, and, for her own sake, change her name. Neither of these things did she intend to do. Nay, she would have kept by her original plan of settling at Blindpits, had it not been for its proximity to Mr. Grant. While her suspicion was so rooted and deep, she could not have any intercourse with him, however slight.

This she very soon took an opportunity of explaining to Bessie, herself introducing the subject which her niece had been on the watch to speak of.

“There is no doubt, Bessie,” she went on to say, “people will be convinced, and will not hesitate to express their convictions, that I am avoiding the scene of my crime. I must endure that, as I have endured all the rest. Vengeance is not mine, but if it were, I would leave Mr. Grant to his own conscience—it cannot always sleep.”

“Aunt,” said Bessie, putting an arm round her neck, “you must be unhappy. How awfully wretched I was the night after you told me what you thought about Mr. Grant; but next morning I asked him him-



self, and your very strange suspicion turned out to be perfectly groundless."

"You had it on the best authority, had you? Poor thing! your knowledge of the evil that is in the world is small; I trust it will never be greater."

"Aunt, Mr. Grant is not evil—he is good; he has felt for you, and worked for you, and he was not even angry when I made that extraordinary revelation to him; he was very sorrowful, for he thought, as I did at the moment, that trouble had turned your brain. He said he could not conceive on what grounds you suspected him, for he was only half-an-hour in the house that day, and never was near meat or drink."

"He did not say that he stopped some minutes at the staircase window where Miss Boston's soup was standing; that he stayed only a short time not to hinder her taking it; that he said to me there was no use sending for a doctor, if he saw one of them he would give him a hint;—he said nothing of all that?"

"Aunt," said Bessie, standing back and looking at her, "do you still mean to say that you seriously believe that Mr. Grant did this thing?"

"I have tried hard not to believe it, Bessie; I

“But he had no want of money; and if he had, all the rents of the estates pass through his hands—better steal than commit murder!”

“He probably had done that till he could do it no longer, and his own death or Miss Boston’s was his only choice to avoid shame and exposure.”

“Aunt! I can hardly believe my ears; you don’t expect me to share such an extraordinary delusion?”

“The delusion is not more extraordinary than what thousands have entertained about me. Whether you share it or not is a matter of no practical moment; we shall have no occasion to see him again. If I am wronging him, I hope to be forgiven; the wrong will go no further than my own thoughts.”

“Aunt, when you went to Blindpits that day and found I had left, did you not wonder why I had left?”

“I thought you were longing to get home; was there any other reason?”

"Yes, there was; I wished to speak to you—I wished to tell you something that had happened; and then from one time to another I put off telling you till some happier opportunity, and now, auntie, I am afraid to give you pain."

Miss Barclay smiled faintly. "I am so seasoned to pain now, Bessie, it seems my natural element—a little more or less hardly signifies."

"Aunt, I wouldn't add to your pain by a straw-breadth if I could help it. Don't be startled, auntie, but—I am—engaged to marry Mr. Grant."

A cry escaped Miss Barclay; she rose from her seat, and her quiet dark eyes actually flashed. "He cannot have been so base—to take advantage of such a time when I was not there to protect you; he might well have been content with putting my life in danger and blasting my good name."

"Stop, aunt, stop! I cannot listen to that; he did not take advantage of me while unprotected; I was with Miss Boston, and she knew and approved of it."

"Bessie, we must go away; perhaps we had better leave the country at once, and see if we can find any termination to all this misery."

his age to impose on your youth and innocence ; if you had only known him sooner as he is ; but let us be thankful it is not altogether too late."

" Aunt, after all this cruel business I love you as I never did before ; but it is impossible—I say it is impossible—I can give Mr. Grant up."

Miss Barclay looked at her niece as if in a dream. She said at last, "That is a strange thing to say. When I was your age it would not have occurred to me to say anything like that to my father or mother."

" O auntie ! I can't help it. What would you have me say or do ?"

" I would have you to be advised. You must have changed sadly if I have no influence with you. Do you think your welfare is less to me than my own ? It is more, much more ; it has been my first thought ever since you came to me a little child of three years old."

" I know it, aunt ; I know all your patience, and

toil, and love. Oh! throw away prejudice, and believe in Mr. Grant's goodness—will you, auntie?"

"Bessie, you are very young; you have known him a very short time, even if he were good. I am asking no great sacrifice when I wish you, for my sake, to see him no more. Be dutiful, my darling."

"Auntie, be pitiful! I love you; nothing shall part thee and me; but I cannot—I cannot give up Mr. Grant."

"Not if I command you?"

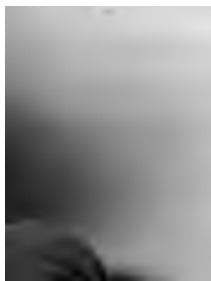
"No, not if you command me."

"Bessie, if I can separate you in no other way, I shall expose that man to the world before I stand by and see you sacrificed to him—my lamb, my innocent lamb!"—and she sobbed.

Bessie grasped her arm. "Aunt," she said, "Mr. Grant's name may be trailed through the mud, but I'll stick to him through all the obloquy, as I have stuck to you; it is a groundless and hideous hallucination that possesses you." Her excitement was great.

Miss Barclay had grown very white; her face had a drawn stony look, as if from severe pain. Bessie

put her arms round her. "O auntie, hear me ! I don't mean that I'll marry him ; I won't do that against your will ; but I must believe in him and love him—I can't help that. Aunt, aunt, have I frightened you, after all you have suffered already ?" She was on her knees before her, and she laid her head on her lap and wept bitterly. It had been long a childish trick of hers to lay her head on her aunt's lap, and have her hair stroked, and almost unconsciously Barbara began to stroke it now. But she had become aware that the child she had nourished so long had passed away ; the child was gone, and the woman was there, who had divided the love that was once all her own with—— And for an instant Barbara lost consciousness and nearly fainted.



CHAPTER LI.

It was midsummer all over the country, leafy and warm. The earth carried the prospect of an abundant harvest; the cattle on a thousand hills were rejoicing; the burns were singing in the glens, the larks at heaven's gate; and the insect world were floating lazily in the sun, or whirling in the maddest of all Scotch reels; even the swallows were darting in and out of their nests, built in the windows that had been Miss Boston's—all as if there had been no celebrated Blindpits trial case. Heatherburgh had talked itself dumb over it, from the Marquis to the parish pauper. They had made it their meat and their drink, till the disgust of satiety had set in, and the subject was dropped. Even the Misses Stark could go into their garden and discuss the fruit prospects and the possibility of a night's sharp frost even at that season, without allusion to Blindpits, that house being

within their view, and Miss Jane having had the very extraordinary fate of being a witness at the trial.

Mr. Grant carried himself well. Originally only Mrs. Ainslie had guessed his feelings towards Bessie, and she came to the conclusion that recent events had altered them, at what stage she did not know; for in endeavouring to draw out his confidence—it was one of her points, the many people who came to pillow their griefs, and cares, and joys on her sympathies—he frankly discussed the matter with her from the spectator's point of view, without betraying to her observation more than a spectator's interest.

Three months had now gone by since the trial, and in all that time he had only seen Bessie once. It was when, in spite of her request that he would not come, he had gone to have an interview with Miss Barclay himself, and had met her niece on the stairs as he was going up. She entreated him not to go farther.

“Although you do,” she said, “aunt won't see you; but do not try it, do not agitate her just now.”

“But it is unreasonable. I must see her some

time; we are not going to wait for ever. You must love her much more than you do me, Bessie; come, do you?"

"She is alone and in affliction; you have everything."

"No, I haven't; I have not my wife; her shadow flits about all the corners yonder at Graftsburn, but I must have the substance."

"Oh, come, don't let us stand here! I'll walk with you anywhere; where are you going?"

"I'm going nowhere; I only came to see your aunt and claim you. I don't know that I should yield, and be foolish enough to go away without doing the business I came for."

"Mr. Grant, if aunt were in ordinary circumstances, and objected to me marrying you, I would run away with you at once; that is, if you wished it," she said simply. "But she is under a ban; I can't leave her—I can't," and she looked into his face entreatingly, her eyes filled with tears.

"Come," he said, "we'll walk." They went to the end of the street. "Perhaps we had better drive," he said, and they got into a cab. "Now," he said,

"we can speak of what is to be done; what do you think?"

"I can think of nothing."

"But something must be done. I've got the old house all brushed up. I daresay I would have brushed up the sea, if I had thought I could make it look better from the windows."

"You might have tried."

"You'll try it; it will look much brighter to me when you come; every hour of the day I fancy you yonder, my wife; and you won't come."

"I can't—I cannot."

"There's Graham away past," he said; "where is he posting to? he did not see us."

"We see him nearly every evening."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes; aunt is fond of him."

"I don't object to that. I'm fond of him myself."

"So am I. He is the best man living except—no, not even except you. He has been kind all through this terrible time; while I live I'll never forget his kindness."

"Does he expect any return, think you, Bessie?"

"Return ! no ; what could be a return ? you know him better than to suppose that."

"No, I don't ; I really don't ; I am sure he would be kind in any case, but maybe he looks for some sort of return."

"Hush, not that ; oh, I hope not !"

"Poor fellow !"

"Do you think there is any unalloyed happiness in this world, Mr. Grant ?"

"I think there is, or something very like it. When I have got you, to have and to hold, Bessie, away at Grantsburn yonder, shall we be happy or not, do you think ?"

"But if we know that other people are miserable ?"

"We'll turn selfish, and forget other people, and that brings us back to the question—What's to be done ? If you'll not let me see your aunt, may I write to her ? Unless she's stone, I hope to make her see reason."

"Yes ; you might try that ; it would be better than speaking—less distressing to her I mean. Whether it would do any good, I doubt."

"We'll try it. We'll try all fair and reasonable means first, Bessie."

"And last too. If these fail, we can do nothing more," she said sadly.

"We can run away. Mind, that's your proposal, not mine. But I'll be quite willing. What would you think if I were to do it just now, whether you will or no, like some of the nice villains in the old novels? Would Graham start up to the rescue, do you think? I sometimes wonder at my own patience. You don't expect me to excuse your aunt and feel amiable very long, do you?"

"I suppose I can't expect it. Indeed, I don't know which way to look for comfort."

"Look to me. Look at me now. When am I to come to give you another drive? Tell me, shall I come every day? or how often?"

"Oh, not often; it would be too much. I can live on this for a long time."

"But I can't. I'll be as hungry at this time to-morrow as ever, and what am I to do?"

"I don't know. Surely something must happen

to put an end to all this miserable uncertainty, although I can't see how."

"I tell you what, Bessie—if your aunt persists in holding to her delusion about me, we must act independently of her. There is nothing else for it."

"It's more like insanity than anything else; and yet in all other things she is the same Aunt Barbara she ever was."

Bessie went home with a light in her eye, to live on the strength of this stolen interview for many days. Mr. Grant went back to Grantsburn, pondering more deeply than ever, if possible, the Blindpits mystery. Only the great suffering Miss Barclay had undergone made him tolerant for a moment of her suspicion of himself. She was driven, in her bewilderment, to some theory; and she had adopted what she thought most likely. He forgave her. But that Bessie and he should be martyrs to her delusion was what he did not mean to submit to. His own theory of Miss Boston's death was that it was accidental; but Dr. M'Vicar was the only person in the district that agreed with him. His son, John Grant, lost no opportunity of proving to his own

satisfaction the impossibility of an accident of the kind. The lawyers had thrown the suggestion aside as useless. Still he clung to it. Unless he was correct in that, then he could not help being compelled to return Miss Barclay's compliment, and consider her guilty. That he could not do.

CHAPTER LII.

As has been said, it was midsummer; and Ironburgh, or that portion of it possessed of the means, had scattered itself to country quarters; and still the Barclay household sat shut into their flat, till Mrs. Barclay, who had been showing a degree of tenderness to Barbara since she had seen her in that death-like faint, proving that she had nerves like other people, could contain herself no longer, and asked if they were to sit still in this little oven all summer, and be suffocated like rats in a hole.

They had been strange weeks to Barbara, since she had got back to her home, spoiled of her good name, to find that even that was not to be the limit of her misery. She felt dazed, except when she was roused by the determination at all hazards to save Bessie from the fate that threatened her. It was a subject, however, that was never mentioned between

them, and in this lay peculiar and exquisite bitterness. They no longer had all things in common—they could not take counsel together. Not only was the loving and obedient child gone, whose pleasant ways had been the life of the house, but in her place there was a woman resolute and reticent, and carrying her own burden of care, young as she was.

The man of Uz was hardly more completely spoiled than Barbara; only friends did not come round her, even to reproach her. Except her own household and that of Mrs. Dods, her acquaintance kept aloof. To her it was a matter of perfect indifference where she was; but when she took in the sense of her mother's complaint, she aroused herself to arrange their immediate removal. There was no obstacle as in years gone by—time was her own, and money they had in plenty. When Graham came in the evening, as usual, he was surprised. There was a breeze at last in the still depressed atmosphere, that he had so often of late tried to fan into fresh motion. That something was wrong between Miss Barclay and her niece he had seen, and he had been fairly mystified. It was in vain for him even to guess; but it was

evident the relations between them were changed. He had gone the length, when opportunity had offered, of sounding the two old ladies, but had found them more ignorant than himself, for they were not aware of any difference, and were sure there was none.

On his entrance, Miss Dobbie hailed him with the information that by that time to-morrow they would be *en route* for the Continent; she had been on the Continent many years ago, etc. Then she and Mrs. Barclay went into a comparison of the then and now facilities of travel. Miss Barclay was sewing, and looking more like herself than Graham had seen her since the never-to-be-forgotten night of her arrest. Bessie was seated at the table, writing a letter it seemed. Graham could not forbear watching her, and wondering to whom she was writing.

He momentarily expected Miss Barclay to look across and ask that question; but she did not. The time was past when she could do that, and even look over her niece's letters to see that they were all right in point of composition, grammar, and spelling.

Besides, Bessie's letter was to be read by a partial

eye. A governess would be horrified by a mistake, which a lover would think the most delicious characteristic little blunder that ever was made. Graham watched her when she addressed the envelope. He was pretty sure that the last word was Heatherburgh. It was not that he was jealous; jealousy did not occur to him. It was that he felt he had a right to Bessie, and everything that was hers.

She had been writing to Mr. Grant under the influence of hope, strong young hope, that had been fed that day by the presence of Mr. Grant himself. As she wrote she sometimes rested her head upon her hand for an instant, and Graham could see her face then. Her eyes were deep and bright, a smile played about her mouth, and she did not seem conscious of the presence of others. Could the letter be to Mary Grant? or to one of the Misses Stark? or more likely still, Susan Ainslie? When she had done she put it in her desk and locked it. Graham said—

“I could post your letter for you if you liked.”

“Oh, thank you! no. Katie could do it if there was any hurry; but to-morrow will do quite well.

Now, auntie, I am ready if you have anything for me to do."

Graham had fully determined that after Miss Barclay's trial was happily over, he would let Bessie know his hopes and wishes; and here he was as far from that point as ever. There seemed some intangible thing to hang in the air which prevented him. It was not want of opportunity; for many a time he lingered till Bessie only was left to keep him company, and one after another he had let these opportunities slip. It was not that he waited for encouragement; that he would run no risk till he was sure. He would have run any risk; besides, he did not think the risk was great. Nor was it that he met with discouragement. She was thoroughly at home with him. She would sit and work away, and speak or not speak, as it occurred to her; and often he watched her in silence—that silence which is the "floodgate of the deeper heart."

Many girls could not appreciate that kind of homage; but Bessie could—only she was pre-occupied and did not notice it. It did cross her mind, however, at a rare time, that Graham might get beyond



a brotherly interest ; but, as her hopes and wishes were against it, she saw most clearly what confirmed these hopes and wishes. Tender and true as she was, there is little doubt that she was selfish in her love ; or at least she was so engrossed, that she held to her theory, that all Graham's attention, constant and unwearied, was kindness, not love. Graham lingered on this night. She was going to-morrow, and he could not let her go away out of his sight without coming to an understanding.

" You are going away to-morrow ?" he said.

" Yes ; so it seems."

" You are looking very bright about it."

" Not at all. If I'm looking bright, it is not about that. Just at this moment I would rather stay here."

" Would you ? Ah ! but you'll all be the better for it. Perhaps you'll go over the ground I went the last summer. I'll let you see my route, and give you the benefit of my small experience." And he brought an atlas, over which their heads were presently bending.

" It's a sudden idea this, of your going away."

"Yes, it seems so; but I fancy aunt must have been thinking of it for a while."

"What?—and not say anything of it to you?"

"It was not necessary that she should tell me."

"No, it was not necessary of course; but"——

"But what?"

"Miss Barclay did not use to keep secrets of that kind from you."

"Ah! you have noticed, have you? I wonder if I might tell you about it? I would like your opinion, Mr. Richardson. Yet I dare scarcely say it. It is the hardest thing to bear; and aunt must be wretched, I'm sure."

"What is hard to bear, Bessie?" he said, looking eagerly into her face, which had got back the sober, wistful look, which was most common to it at this time.

"Estrangement between aunt and me. Do you know anything of mental disease, Mr. Richardson?"

"I don't like to be Mr. Richardsoned by you, Bessie. Call me Graham; why not?"

"There's no reason against it that I know of."

But you have not answered my question. Do you know anything of mental disease?"

"Very little, I am thankful to say. But why do you ask?"

"You know nothing of monomania?"

"I know there is such a thing—a hallucination on one point, while the mind is clear on every other."

"Don't be startled; but I'm almost driven to the conclusion that aunt is a monomaniac!"

"Bessie!"

"Mr. Grant has had that idea all along since I told him; but I would not let him say it. Only to-day he was here to try to reason with her; but I intercepted him on the stair. She could not bear it now. And, oh, if trouble has really touched aunt's mind, how awful that would be!" And she held her head down to hide the tears that sprang from her eyes.

"Awful, indeed," said Graham; "but it's nonsense. Mr. Grant hardly knows her. Depend upon it, she is no more a monomaniac than I am; not so much, because I am possessed by one idea just now."

"It had need to be a pleasant one; aunt's is hideous."

"What is it? I can guess nothing hideous."

"You remember the evening when you took me to see her the last time before the trial."

"I'll never forget it, nor your face when you came home."

"I never endured such a night as that in my life. She told me when I saw her—what do you think she could possibly tell me?"

"That had the effect of making you look like yon? I can't possibly imagine."

"She told me she believed Mr. Grant had poisoned Miss Boston. She believed that then, and she believes it yet. What do *you* think of that?"

"That's a hallucination with a vengeance. Does she give any reasons for it?"

"None, except that he happened to be in the house that day, and passed Miss Boston's dinner on his way up stairs. It was standing on the window-sill, and she says she heard him stop at the window for a minute or so."

"You did not believe it when she told you?"

"I think I must, till I came to my senses; I had been so accustomed, you know, to rely on aunt's word and opinions; but not when I got time, and asked Mr. Grant next morning."

"And he didn't admit having done it? I would like to have seen his face when you asked him."

"His face grew quite gray; but he did not seem to mind it much."

"I daresay not. Mr. Grant commit murder! carry about powder with him ready to shake into an old woman's soup, should he get the chance! It's an idea worthy of a romance of the middle ages."

"Well, it's aunt's idea, I assure you, and nothing but the unravelling of the mystery will ever make her think otherwise."

"That was the reason then she avoided Mr. Grant? no wonder! But have patience, Bessie; when she has had a while to throw off the effects of this wretched time, her mind will regain its tone, and she'll see her error. It can do Mr. Grant no harm, but it's a thousand pities for herself, and for you—for you—my darling! I may speak now, may I not, after holding my tongue so long? But you know it, Bessie; you know

my love for you, and you'll be—will you not?" and he drew her nearer to him;—"you'll be my"—

"Don't," she cried, as if in pain; "don't, don't; O Mr. Richardson! I thought you must have seen. Surely I have not deserved this? Have I done anything to bring this on you and me?"

"What is it, Bessie?" he said kindly. "What is it that I have not seen? I have seen you in all phases. What a dream I had on that sofa of your death, when your looks gave me such a fright! and when I awoke there you were standing by, to thrill my soul with hope."

"Stop, stop, Mr. Richardson. Can nothing but death happen to Lucy?"

"Not to my Lucy. Only death shall part thee and me."

"Mr. Richardson," she said, sadly, "I would have done anything to prevent this. I thought I had done something. We can never forget your kindness, but—but"—

"But what, Bessie? What is it? Tom Ainslie hasn't"—

"No, no!"

"What is it then?"

"I'm engaged to be married."

She spoke as low as if she had been confessing a crime,—as if she were sinning against Graham's goodness. He seized her hand—

"I can't believe it—I must have known it—there is no one—say that's not true, Bessie."

"Mr. Grant loves you as a younger brother; let me be your sister."

"I don't doubt Mr. Grant's love," he said huskily.

"What has that to do with it?"

"We should both wish to"—

"Bessie"—a sudden light flashing on him—

"You're not going to—it's not Mr. Grant you're going to marry?"

"When aunt will let me. Oh! be our brother, Graham," she said, softly pressing his hand, which still held hers.

"I shall go mad!" he cried, and tossing her hand from him, before she could speak he was out of the room, and she heard the outer door shut behind him. She sat still almost stupified, her uppermost thought being—



“Oh, if I could suffer for him ; if I could only suffer for him !” But she couldn’t, and though gifted with a good share of imagination, she did not even imagine this suffering. Her only measure was, “If I should lose Mr. Grant !” But then Mr. Grant was so immeasurably her superior, that for Graham to lose her, was not to be mentioned in the same breath with her losing Mr. Grant.

It is difficult for a person in cold blood to realise that he or she is of such paramount interest in the eyes of another. All at once a glad thrill went through Bessie, when Sara Anderson occurred to her. “He has got over one disappointment in no very long time, and the first must be the worst. He will soon get over this.”

She went to her bedroom, the room she had so long shared with her aunt. A trunk was standing open on the floor, and Miss Barclay was turning out the contents of drawers, selecting and packing for the projected departure. Bessie sat down and looked on. Her aunt’s capacity for attending to all kinds of commonplace details, in any circumstances, was a perpetual miracle to her. She remembered reading

various celebrated criminal trials, and she had tried to picture the after-life of the people concerned in them, and wondered if they could possibly subside into ordinary life after being exposed to the unmitigated glare of the world's dark lantern; if a man could go back to his business, and a woman compose herself to her seam (in her eye the pitch of domestic virtue); if the household could live together on the old terms, or if suspicion killed kindness. Strangely—and the exceeding strangeness of it could never pass away—here she was in the very position she had speculated about; and there was her aunt, to all appearance, as calmly inspecting underclothing, and stowing it away, as if she had not sat for three days in the criminal dock. For the time Graham Richardson and even Mr. Grant were driven out of her head. If her aunt would have let things go by the board; if she would have lain on a sofa, weeping and reading novels alternately; if she would have kindled up into a tragedy speech occasionally, Bessie could have borne it; but to see her not only make no ado, but slip quietly into her old place; to see her put everything to rights, and then take her post as guardian, and



slave of the household! Nay, in return for their father's kindness, she had asked the Misses Fraser to come as usual for music lessons, and there she sat an hour every day patiently directing the fat stiff perspiring fingers in their very hopeless task.

She was on her knees in front of the trunk, arranging its contents, when suddenly Bessie threw herself down beside her.

"O auntie! you are too good—too good; let me in again. Don't shut me out of your heart, and take Mr. Grant in too; please, auntie," she concluded in a low childish tone. Miss Barclay did not speak. "Why should you suspect evil in others who are so good yourself? Only to-day Mr. Grant was"——

"Bessie, my dear," said Miss Barclay, in measured tones, "I have already expressed the wish, and I express it again, that you will not name that name in my hearing. As for shutting you out of my heart, you have been too long there to be easily put out, or kept out. It will be your own doing if ever that happens."

"Aunt, you have confidence in Mr. Richardson.

I couldn't help telling him about it to-night—not for my own sake, but yours; and he thought the idea too outrageous to be entertained for a moment.”

“It was imprudent to speak of it; let it never be mentioned again.”

“I would be guilty of any imprudence if I thought I could move you.”

“I'll speak to Graham to-morrow.”

“You may not see him to-morrow. I don't think he'll be here.”

“Yes; he is to look in to do anything for us. He is a young man to whom I never can feel sufficiently grateful.”

“O aunt!” said Bessie, and the words came drearily from the bottom of her heart, “I am weary of life. I used to wonder at heathens killing themselves. I don't wonder now. Step by step we come to understand things. Surely I haven't much more to learn!”

In former days Miss Barclay would have thrown all the strength of her nature into a suitable reply to such a speech as this. Now she broke down. It was grievous to her that the young girl she had so



long tried to keep from every blast that blew, should have come to such a finding about life already. She put an arm round her neck.

“Darling!” she sobbed—“My darling!—we have been sorely tried.”

“Aunt, I did not mean to vex you. O aunt! say I am wicked; give me a lecture—anything—but don’t cry.”

Estrangement between these two was indeed a wretched thing.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE projected journey was never more than projected. Mrs. Barclay was not able to leave her bed next day, although very anxious to do so. She had an illness which lingered long, and even threatened once or twice to be serious. She and her faithful henchwoman, Miss Dobbie, were as disappointed as two children. Miss Barclay and Bessie were thankful to stay at home. One evening and another passed, and no Graham appeared as usual.

"I am surprised Graham has not come yet," Miss Barclay said to Bessie. "After clinging to us in all our distress, he surely won't fail us now."

"Aunt!" said Bessie, and she stopped.

"Well?"

"I haven't expected Graham since the last night he was here."

"Why not?"

"Because he went away not very well pleased; that is, he was disappointed because"——

"Because what, Bessie? What could you possibly say? I can't afford to lose Graham Richardson."

"I'm sure I didn't deserve it, aunt. Looking over things, I never did give him grounds to suppose that I"——

"To suppose what?" said Miss Barclay anxiously.

"He said he loved me, and wanted me to love him. That, you know, is impossible," she said simply.

"O Bessie, have you really thrown Graham Richardson away? I don't know, I never knew, his equal"—in the warmth of her feelings she waxed eloquent—"and all for the sake of a base bad man, who"——

"Stop, aunt; I'll not hear Mr. Grant spoken of in that way"—and all the dignity of a woman came into her demeanour. "You may praise Graham—

you can't praise him too much ; the other had better not be spoken of between us."

"Better not, indeed !" Miss Barclay was saying, when Mrs. Dods was shown into the room.

"I cam in to speer for Mrs. Barclay. I hope she is nae waur."

"Thank you, Mrs. Dods ; she's much the same—rather better perhaps. Miss Dobbie is with her. I don't know what we should do without her."

"Ay," said Mrs. Dods ; "we're needing a nurse wi' us the now, but I misdoubt she would hardly do, even if ye could spare her."

"Who's ill, Mrs. Dods ?—not Mr. Dods, I hope."

"No, he's gey weel the now, I'm thankful. It's Mr. Richardson, puir callant ! He gaed out late for a walk twa three nights syne, and it cam on a heavy shower ; but he never heeded, and next morning his head was that sair he couldna lift it aff the pillow ; and the day the doctor says it's brain-fever."

"Brain-fever !" cried Bessie ; "he's not seriously ill, is he ?"

"That's to be seen yet, but I hope no."

“Who is with—is there any one with him?” asked Miss Barclay.

“Tammis is noticing him the time I am out. I was thinking o’ writing to Mrs. Richardson, his step-mother, only I’ve aye heard tell o’ her as an unco delicate woman.”

“Don’t,” said Miss Barclay; “it will afford me no ordinary pleasure to be of use to him. He deserves some kindness at our hands. I’m thankful for the opportunity.”

“Weel, if ye think ye’re able, it will be a great ease to my mind. I canna do a’thing, an’ to get a stranger into the house ye ken naething about is a thocht to me.”

It was all true. Graham had rushed out into the night—I was nearly going to say—like the foxes Samson set adrift in the fields of the Philistines with burning brands tied to their tails. Part of him was certainly on fire, and the open air fanned the flame. He strode along, neither knowing where he was going nor the rate at which he was walking. What to him was the beauty of the summer twilight, the

setting sun, the infant moon gleaming from among cloudy swaddling-clothes, the tall brick chimneys with their sable plumes, that came out with such effect against the sinking sun glowing in the west? Although not generally reckoned picturesque, these last were as much to him at that moment as all the host of heaven. Nature can't kill a youthful grief; but when it is dead it can, like the robin redbreasts, cover it with leaves. Graham's grief was only newly and suddenly come into being, and cried lustily, and bade fair for long life. A walk in the same twilight may lay the ghost of it in after years, and it was not an enemy that had done this thing, but his own best familiar friend. How was a sudden downpour of rain to attract his attention while he was consumed by such a thought as that? But not even in the midst of such a wild conflict as possessed him, did it occur to his mind that Mr. Grant had taken any advantage that could be called unfair, far less that his continental trip had been a link in the chain of events that had lost him his love. This did not occur to him now. It happily never occurred to him



afterwards. Not that he was a simpleton, but his was one of those noble natures that are filled with the "charity that thinketh no evil." Suspect his friend! the man who had been his friend; yes, had been; for he could be such no longer. He might bear it, he might learn to bear it, at a distance possibly—but all intercourse was over between them. Ah! how in the years he had known her, she had crept into his study of imagination, and this was to be the end—this! Miss Barclay's infatuation regarding Mr. Grant escaped his memory. It never struck him that with her help he might overturn the marriage, and gain Bessie even yet. Only one thought was present to him—he had lost his love, and he had lost his friend—surely woe enough to overtake a man in one moment of one day; and the wild flame of jealousy shot up every now and then, and threw a fierce light on the ruin of his hopes.

Drenched with the rain, he went back through the empty streets. His pace had slackened as the first bewildering excitement passed off. He crawled up the stairs and got to bed, and there he tossed

without seeing sun or stars for many days. Thought and memory equally failed him. The desk at his office missed him, and his fellow-clerks also. They had always considered him as a youth gifted with a kind of virtue rather tightlaced; but among them he was a favourite, likely for that very reason.

"I say," said clerk No. 1 to clerk No. 2, "Graham Richardson has brain-fever, poor fellow!—a fact."

"Brain-fever!" said No. 2; "I shouldn't wonder though he had fifty brain-fevers. The way he threw himself into that murder case might have given a horse a brain-fever, or even a donkey."

"Well," said No. 1; "he is a striking instance of virtue rewarded, and so am I. I went last night to his lodgings to ask for him. I've a mind to write out all I saw and heard, laying on colour of course, and try which of the papers would come down most genteelly for the paragraph."

"Come, man, out with it. Did you see Graham; and how is he?"

"When I got to his door it was opened by a queer old man, in a coat of many colours, from age.



When he knew that I was a friend of Graham's, he took me into a parlour, where he insisted, like Hardcastle in the play, on giving me his company and opinions; when out of an inner room there glided—whom do you think?”

“Come; go on. How am I to know?”

“There glided the celebrated Miss Barclay. I knew her at a glance, for I studied her face at the trial. Says she, ‘I presume you are one of Mr. Richardson’s friends, kindly come to inquire for him. The medical men are very hopeful of him now; but meantime he is to see no one.’”

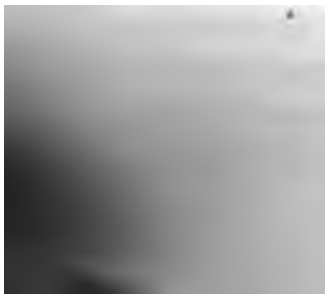
“I gave my name and left; and as I was going out, said to my old man, ‘Is Miss Barclay attending Mr. Richardson?’”

“Deed is she,” said he; “and a better nurse canna be.”

“‘No accounting for tastes!’ I muttered; and at that moment I saw the head of the thick-skinned boorish preacher who was so well raked at the trial—and on whom and the servant Armstrong tried to throw suspicion—stuck out at a door. Graham is cer-

tainly one of a happy family. Upon my word, I breathed more freely when I got into the open air again."

"Rather he than I have such a nurse. I hope there will be no mistake with his food or medicine. It makes one feel queer."



CHAPTER LIV.

It was a long time before Graham knew who nursed him, although Barbara devoted herself by night and day to him, with the honest integrity of her nature, warmed by her liking for him, and her sense of gratitude. When he did become alive to the fact, he was as weak as an infant, and he accepted it without being able to think about it. His room was darkened, and Barbara was sitting leaning on the foot of his bed, her head bent, and half asleep.

"Is it you, Miss Barclay?" he said, almost in a whisper.

She was at his side in an instant.

"Yes, Graham."

"I have been ill, haven't I?"

"You've been seriously ill."

"How long have I been ill?"

"I want to know," Miss Barclay—"I want to know—is Bessie married yet?"

"No," she said shortly; and then he turned his face to the wall, and she resumed her seat, and the needlework with which she beguiled the hours of watching.

When Graham first got out of bed he was like a ghost. He sat on a chair and looked on his hands as if they were things that did not belong to him. He said to Barbara, who was gently combing his hair—

"Are you not frightened for such a skeleton? if a puff of wind were to come across me, I think my bones would rattle."

"You are certainly rather thin, but a short time will obviate that; for the next few weeks you must do nothing but eat and sleep."

"Has any one been here the time I've been ill—to ask for me, I mean?"

"Yes; there was a young man from your office."

"None else?"

"Not so far as I am aware." There was a pause.

"Miss Barclay," he began again, "has—has Bessie never been here?"

"No, but she has been very anxious about you."

"Why should she?" he said bitterly. "Why should any one be anxious about me? If I had died, who would have been sorry? But I have lived, and there is no one to welcome me. I have nothing to live for."

"Mr. Richardson," said Barbara, gently, "I think you do wrong in allowing yourself to talk in that strain."

"I can't help it. To lose her is more than I can bear."

"O Graham"—and she sank on her knees at the side of his chair—"what is your loss to mine? She came to me a little child; she has been all I ever had to love; and she is lost—more lost to me than if she were in her grave. You, when you have shaken off your present weakness, will rise to new life and strength, and find other objects to live for;

but what have I?—what can I have? A woman broken in name and spirit. Yet I live, and I have never complained to a human being before.”

There was a rush of feeling to Graham’s heart at this sudden burst, which, in his weakness, nearly choked him. He recalled the prison scenes, and the terrible time of the trial. He grasped her hands as her head rested on his knee.

“Barbara!” he said; “Barbara, I owe my life to you. If it will comfort you, don’t let us separate. Let us comfort each other. Be mine—be my wife. I will shield and love you while I live.”

“Graham,” she said, rising to her feet in astonishment, “you forget me, and you forget yourself.”

“No, no,” he said. “I know there are some years between us, if that’s what you mean, but it will make no difference to us; and I care nothing for other people’s opinions. Besides, I’m old—I feel very old.”

“Poor boy!” she said, looking at him kindly. “If I were to take advantage of your weakness, you would be repenting before this time to-morrow.”



Barbara was not impulsive, and she was judicious. She loved Graham with the love of an elder sister, or a good aunt—more even, for she had deeply felt his kindness in the time of her sore need; but she was not one of those women whose whole feelings, at some time of their lives, are swept into one channel, and who are carried away, *coûte que coûte*, by the rush. Neither did she ever yearn for rest and a lean on a stronger nature. Her love for Bessie, having had time and opportunity, had become nearly a passion, and had betrayed her for the moment into her impulsive utterance to Graham; but she was not without other sources of satisfaction. She could look life in the face, and feel that she had done what in her lay to make the best of it, and that she could still do that. In fact, her life had been so long one of neutral tints, that she almost shrank from bright colouring, as weak eyes from the glare of the sun; and, having little imagination, she had never painted dazzling pictures of what life might be in a different combination of circumstances. Even in the terrible ordeal to which she had been subjected, although she pitied herself, she did not, like

Bessie, fly against the injustice of it, but looked at it as the necessary consequence of the incidents of the case.

"You say," she continued, "that you care nothing for the opinion of others; but what others think and say of us goes a long way to make our happiness or the reverse. Not that I would be the slave of public opinion either; but we ought not to leave it altogether out of our reckonings. People would think you mad to marry an old woman who had been tried for murder."

"Miss Barclay!" cried Graham.

"Yes; people would express their opinion in such words as these, and you would not like it. We shall always be good friends. If in after-life this should recur to your memory, you will feel deeply grateful that I happened to be gifted with more sense than had fallen as yet to your share."

Graham hardly knew whether to laugh or cry—most likely he did both. With his reasoning powers he had long admired Miss Barclay; and when she had given way to such a strong outburst of feeling, he was drawn towards her, and in his weakness and



desolation he fancied he loved her; but when she relapsed into propriety, the little dark bushy flower tied up to a stick came before him, and by the time she got to the end of her sensible speech he felt that all she said was wonderfully true, and that in giving vent to his overwrought feelings he had made a fool of himself. Commonly, all that Miss Barclay said was true, with certainly no admixture of poetry. A lady of less common sense than Miss Barclay might have thought it necessary to retire from her post of sick-nurse after such an interview with her patient; but she did not, and the strong friendship between Graham and her settled itself on a more satisfactory and less romantic level. She felt happier than she had been since the quiet tenor of her life had been so cruelly broken in upon. Nor did Mr. Dods neglect his favourite lodger; whenever Barbara went home, he took her place by Graham's bed, and beguiled his tedium in his own way.

"Ay," he would say, "ye're a different thing a'thegether from what ye were this day-week; ye'll soon be on your legs again."

"So they say, but I'm as weak as water."

“By-the-by I’ve a message for ye—Mr. Pettigrew has his compliments, and could he do anything for ye—sit up a night, or the like o’ that?” and Mr. Dods gave a low chuckle.

“Tell Mr. Pettigrew I’m obliged to him, but there’s nothing I need.”

“I’ll do nae sic thing; ye’re no obliged to him, and there’s no use telling a lee; I’ll just say ye dinna want him.”

“That’s true, certainly,” said Graham, smiling even in his weakness.

“Ay, it’s true; onybody wad be ill off for a nurse that took him, and ye’re by ordinar’ weel off.”

“Miss Barclay is infinitely kind,” said Graham, warmly.

“An’ to think on sic a cloud settling on her life; puir thing! puir thing! And no only on her, but the lassie, Bessie. Do ye ken she was in here this forenoon, looking at ye when ye was sleepin’? She asked if you were sleepin’ before she came in. Your hand was lying outside the claes, and she stooped and touched it with her lips, and when she looked up again I saw the water in her een. She



slipped away, and a minute after Mr. Grant came in and stood beside ye, and said, 'Poor fellow! poor fellow!' I wanted to waken ye, but he wadna let me."

Graham turned his face to the wall, and the tears trickled down his cheeks; as he did not speak, the old man went on—

"It was the time Miss Barclay was in with her mother, but she'll ken mair about Mr. Grant's visit, and will likely be tellin' ye."

As Graham still did not speak, Mr. Dods took the hint, and was silent also, supposing that the patient, soothed by hearing of the kindness of his friends, was dropping asleep again, and he slid from the room.

But he had said enough to put Graham, weak as he was, into a ferment of thought and feeling. He rose from his bed, and, looking in the glass, met his great eyes; thrice their usual size they seemed, because the flesh had all left his face. Even the blood appeared to have left it also, so ghastly was it. He smiled, and the effect was weird. Staggering back to his bed, he looked at his hand, and said, "She

kissed that bunch of bones ! strange that I slept on ; such a touch might have roused the dead. O Bessie !” he cried, and with that yearning cry he lost consciousness.

He had a relapse which the doctors and Miss Barclay said could not be accounted for. But youth triumphed. Graham was not made to die of disappointed love. His nature was far too sound and whole for that ; and when he was able, which was not till the October of the year, he went away from Ironburgh. But, before he left, there recurred to him what Bessie had said to him regarding her aunt’s hallucination about Mr. Grant. At the moment he heard it he dismissed it as ridiculous, and he had altogether lost sight of it. Afterwards, in his own fight of affliction, he took an opportunity to speak of it.

“ Miss Barclay,” he said, and he coloured as he said it, “ when I made the proposal that offended you so much ”——

“ No, not offended, Graham. I couldn’t be offended, knowing, as I did, that you meant the truest kindness, mistaken though you were.”



“Mistaken or not, I was led on to it by your grief at losing Bessie. That was ground common to us both. You said she was more lost to you than if she was in her grave”——

“A thousand times.”

“I did not take in the meaning of the words then, but I have thought of it since—you object to Mr. Grant?”

“Object? Bessie told you what I believed him to be, didn’t she?”

“Yes, she did; but it never laid hold of me. Miss Barclay, it is an impossibility on the very face of it.”

“Graham, the thing was done. I did it or he did it. No other creature had the opportunity.”

“I’ll sooner believe that you did it, Miss Barclay.”

“That may afford satisfaction to your mind,” she said, with some bitterness, “but it does not afford satisfaction to mine.”

“He has been my best friend since I was the height of that table, and is a man of spotless character. I shouldn’t grudge him his happiness in winning

Bessie ; but, for the life of me, I can't help it. I grudge it to the verge of madness."

" Yet you would have been content with me !"
And Barbara said this, not with the intention of quizzing what, from her point of view, she might have thought the young man's heroics, as she might have done if she had had a sense of humour, but with a shade of asperity not altogether unnatural.

" Yes, I could—I am sure I could—if you could have been content with me. What remains for me better than contentment, if indeed I reach that ?"

Women in this world are somewhat in the position of the Englishman in India—if they have patience they are likely to lose it ; and if they haven't, in all probability they will gain it. Even this good, generous lad could forget himself, and give Barbara an opportunity of increasing her stock of patience ; but her life had been one long opportunity of that kind. If Graham had been less truthful, he had been more complimentary.

" I wonder, for instance, if, in the nature of things, I can ever go to Grantsburn to visit Mr. Grant or Bessie ?"



"Not Bessie. You'll never visit Bessie there if I live and retain my reason. I've told her, and she knows I'll keep my word, that if I can prevent her going there only by exposing him to the world, I'll do it. Hypocrite as he is, it is scarcely probable that he'll risk that."

"Miss Barclay, this is incredible! It is liker insanity than anything else. Mr. Grant not risk it? Why, I would stake my life he would come out of any investigation cleaner than the driven snow."

"I've no wish for revenge; though it is a hard thing for me to lie under such a ban. But if he lets Bessie alone, I'll do nothing, And he is letting her alone. He will wait, she says, for my consent."

And there came into her face a dark—very dark expression. She thought of the mischief done already—Bessie's youth blighted, and the wretched estrangement between them.

"Well, Miss Barclay, I'm sorry for you—profoundly sorry. You're making your own unhappiness now. I can do nothing for any one, it seems, and I'll go my way. But at least I carry with me perfect

faith in you and Mr. Grant, and that is something. It is nearly everything. If I suspected either of you, I think I should die even yet. It would not take much to knock me back to where I was."

"I would give all I have, or am ever likely to have, to any one who would prove Mr. Grant's innocence. Perhaps, if you were in my position, you would view matters in a different light."

As she said this, Graham's pity for the solitary, bereaved woman mastered him again. He kissed her hand and said—

"Light will be thrown on it some day, Miss Barclay; be sure of that. Let us live in that hope." Barbara shook her head, and they parted.

Truly Herod, in collecting all the chief men for slaughter when the breath should have left his own body, that he might secure mourning in the land, failed in his end; but Miss Boston, who in life desired nothing but the happiness of her friends, in death had caused deep and prolonged woe to every one she had loved best. Barbara, Bessie, and James Grant, the three people to whom her affections had really flowed out, found themselves in a labyrinth of ghastly



painful mystery, out of which there seemed no clue. Mr. Grant, it is true, presided at the tenantry dinner, and joked, and laughed, and discussed agricultural affairs, as had been his manner; but it was remarked that this geniality was not the spontaneous thing it had been; it was thought somewhat forced. He rode about on Meg; but even Meg seemed to have caught the infection of care, for she did not show such sprightly bearing as had been her wont. Miss Grant, upon whose imagination the mysterious death of Miss Boston had laid deep hold, brought it up before her brother perpetually. She did not believe Miss Barclay guilty, yet did not see her way to her innocence; and she bewailed the calamity on Bessie's account. What will become of *her*? What *will* become of her? was a question she asked a hundred times, as if wholly unconscious she had asked it before at all. She and the Misses Stark turned the matter over every time they met, and that was not seldom. Mrs. Ainslie held to her original belief in Barbara's innocence; but she did not openly become her champion. She dropped all allusion to her in

Mrs. Peter's toes violently under the table; and Mrs. Peter called out, who was tramping on her foot?

In Mr. Grant's rides he must often pass Blindpits. John Simpson's grandchildren used every liberty in Miss Boston's premises. A perpetual washing, not of the most ornamental kind, was hung on Miss Boston's bushes to dry; and a board laid on two big stones, by the side of the door, was towards evening often occupied by John and his son-in-law, while they smoked the calumet of peace. Truly the place that knew Miss Boston so long knew her no more. And, on the shore-road, he often passed the rock from which he had rescued Bessie. If she had been drowned then she could hardly be more out of his reach than she was now. No wonder Mr. Grant was not quite the jovial man he had been. And Barbara and Bessie?—it was much that they had had occupation, the one in nursing Graham, and the other attending to her grandmamma; but now Graham was

gone, and Mrs. Barclay was better ; and once more, with little talk of it, and heavy hearts, they began to pack for their journey—Miss Dobbie, with her perennial spirit, doing all the pleasures of anticipation ; but even she found it hard work.

CHAPTER LV.

GRAHAM was gone. Hitherto all his holidays had been spent at Grantsburn. He remembered going there for the vacation, and it seemed only yesterday, although it was when he was fifteen. He had been made a man of by his stepmother sending him a watch. He remembered an elderly man opposite him in the railway carriage smiling—he didn't know why at the time, but he knew now, it was at the frequency with which he pulled out his watch. Probably the man was thinking then, as he was thinking now, what a grand thing it was to be young, to have a watch, to be reading *Old Mortality* for the first time, and to be going home for the holidays. Why, life then was all sparkling with bubbles like a glass of champagne. He had finished *Old Mortality* before he went to bed that night. He wondered if Cuddy could make him laugh now. He fancied he was old; and he was at

least old enough to have found out that grief and disappointment do not last, in their first bitterness, for ever. It is questionable if, at the moment, this is a consolation. Nay, is it not a species of mockery to think

“How that which was the life’s life of our being,
Can pass away, and we recall it thus.”

But on this journey Graham had company. Mr. Dods had volunteered to escort him to the place of Mr. Dods’ nativity, to see him comfortably settled, and to introduce him to the inhabitants. It was a grand occasion for Mr. Dods. He did not need to envy the boy away for his holidays. He had his worries, as we all know, and he felt them; but he had been born with an india-rubber temperament, and he belonged to a generation who, if they struck deep notes, did not let them resound beyond their own bosoms. As a poet, he might have been excused for having his fits of melancholy musing, if he had had them; but now that he was fairly out from under Mrs. Dods’ eye, and equally rid of Pettigrew and his boots, his spirits rose till a school-boy of the present day would have seemed decidedly solemn and *blasé*

alongside of him. Stories that had lain *perdu* in his memory for many a year crept up like daisies from below the winter's sod at the breath of spring; for, with sorrow be it said, Mrs. Dods was not one of those wives who feel it their privilege or their duty to smile sweetly and laugh freshly, as if the anecdote in hand had burst upon them in the dew of its youth. On the contrary, when in the humour, she frightened his reminiscences back into their holes, whence they only emerged in the absence of the cat.

The place that Mr. Dods hoped would one day be proud to claim him as its own, or rather to contest that claim with Ironburgh, was a brisk little country town, lying on a ridge among swelling uplands. The district round was cultivated like a garden, and dotted with farm-houses and gentlemen's seats, peering out of woods, not patriarchal certainly, but old enough to flush into a strange bright beauty under the gaze of the October sun. There were cottages on the skirts of the village covered with roses still blooming; one of these Graham thought might suit him.

"They look poetical enough, but the poetry is



rheumatic. I'm going to take ye to rooms up a stair, wi' windows to the street, where ye'll see a' that goes on."

"And what will go on? besides, I care nothing for what goes on."

"No yet; but by this day week ye'll rise frae your denner to look at a noise; it's the way here. Walking up the street the now, for instance, a hundred een are looking at us, that's fifty folk, a sma' percentage, and by night everybody'll ken we're here, and where we cam frae, and what we cam for."

"I think we had better have gone to some less curious place."

"If ye ken sic a place; but unless it's the heart of a city, I dinna."

Mr. Dods conducted him to the top of the long straggling street, through a long dirty close, and up a stair, and they were asked by a decent oldish woman into a small room, the windows of which did not seem to have been opened for a week, while a strong sun beat into it.

"This is like an oven," said Graham, sinking on a little hard careworn sofa.

have light and air."

"Weel, I'll pu' up the blinds, and open a window."

"And can I not get out to walk without going through that close and down that street?"

"That's the advantage in the present state of your body; it wadna been gude for ye if ye could hae got slinking out without dressing yourself and brushing your coat."

Graham thought he was properly punished for being so weak as put himself under his landlord's care. They walked together, more perhaps than Graham was very able for; but he could not rest, and the weather was magnificent—still, bright days, with deep blue skies, and an air pure and cool. The year might be dying, but it was dying with infinite pluck; it made Graham partly ashamed of himself.

"'Tis a fair world after all," said he to Mr. Dods.

"Ay," said Mr. Dods. "When I come here out of Ironburgh, it aye looks as if the whole district had

been keepit under a glass shade since the last time I saw it—it all looks so bright and clear.”

“It is dazzling after Ironburgh smoke.”

“‘God made the country, man made the town’—you would think that might have occurred to onybody as weel as Cowper. I whiles wonder, if ever my poems see the light o’ day, what sentences in them will pass into the language.”

“It’s hard to say, Mr. Dods; an author’s not the best judge of that.”

“Weel, I daresay no; a man’s often unconscious of his best things.”

“Genius often is, but talent always makes the most of its good things, and crows about them like these cocks. By the way, why do cocks crow more at this season than any other?”

“Do they? Ah! ye havena the poet’s keen sense of observation, Mr. Graham. You’ll maybe mind the verse in my ‘Ode to Spring’—

‘When hushed is labour’s cheerful hum,
And reapers from the fields all go,
The silence of the year has come,
’Tis then the cocks are heard to crow.’”

“ True, most true ; that will perhaps be one verse that may, for aught we know, pass into the language ; why shouldn’t it ? it reminds me of Shakspeare’s ‘ Winter Day.’ I would not like to say how often I’ve repeated the lines to myself in church :—

‘ When all aloud the wind doth blow,
And coughing drowns the parson’s saw,
And birds sit brooding in the snow,
And Marian’s nose looks red and raw.’ ”

“ That’s like the thing,” said Mr. Dods.

“ It is the thing,” said Graham, “ full and graphic ; but you poets pack ideas like herrings in a barrel, where we poor mortals pass and see nothing.”

“ There’s some truth in that. Weel, ye’ll ken next time that the cocks dinna craw mair at this season, they’re only better heard.”

“ I’ll never forget it. Then, Mr. Dods, is there anything particular about us, that we are so stared at, or is it because the people here have nothing else to do—can you tell me ?”

“ It’s both, sir. It’s gotten wind that you and me’s gey intimate wi’ Miss Barclay. At the time o’ the trial, they tell me, five hundred extra papers were



sold in this place, and the folk are no very busy; they're no driven here as they are in Ironburgh. What tempted the gudewife to gang to Ironburgh is mair than I ken," and Mr. Dods sighed.

"I hate to be stared at," said Graham. "Intimate with Miss Barclay! what do they expect to see? I'll leave this place; it's very fine and bracing, and all that, but I'll leave, Mr. Dods."

"You should stay another week at least; ye're looking a different thing already."

"I am different. I'll go to my stepmother; I'll not frighten her now. I'll leave with you to-morrow, Mr. Dods."

"Weel, weel! we've had an uncommon pleasant week, and ye may be the better of another change," and Mr. Dods sighed. His holiday was over. They travelled so far together, but Mr. Dods' spirits had somewhat flagged; his stories, after having played about for a week, were creeping back to their hiding-places, and he was resuming the taciturn subordinate part of Mrs. Dods' husband.

Graham, who had shrunk at first from going to his stepmother, because she was Mr. Grant's sister, and

he might meet him there, and because, being a delicate woman, he did not wish to shock her by his grim gaunt appearance, went to her now, and was much made of. As the old rhyme has it, he wanted three things—"sleep, meat, and makin' o'"—a glorious combination to a worn-out body and mind; and he got them, made fragrant by a gentle sense of home stealing all round him. All the influences were soothing. Mrs. Richardson had, like everybody, heard of the Barclay trial, but it had passed from her thoughts like other nine-days' wonders, and she did not speak of it. Bessie Barclay's name she had heard from her sister, but she knew neither of the interest her brother nor her stepson had in her. Had she known there is little doubt she would have tried to lead Graham to the dangerous subject, but it was safe from her handling, and he was thankful. Several times she spoke of her brother, but the topic not being taken up with customary frankness, she said at last—

"Graham, is there any disagreement between you and your uncle?"

"None."



"Are you going to Grantsburn before you go back to Ironburgh?"

"I'm not going back to Ironburgh. I'm tired of it, and I mean to learn German. I'll go to the Continent for a while."

"Is German of much use to a factor?"

"It may be, but it is of use to a man. There are many German books I want to read."

"Does your uncle know of this plan?"

"No; I suppose I'm old enough to plan for myself," and he laughed a little bitter laugh.

Mrs. Richardson could not make it out.

"I think you should ask his advice though."

"Perhaps I should; if I were a dutiful nephew I would. I have written to Ironburgh for some letters of introduction. I mean, if I can get it, to take a situation in Hamburg. I can't afford to be idle, you know."

"The notion is sudden, surely."

"Of going to Hamburg? well, perhaps, but I have long thought of leaving the country."

"Why should you leave the country?"

"Why should I stay in it?"

"Graham!" said she, reproachfully.

"You think I'm ungrateful, dear mamma. I'm not ungrateful, I'm only restless; just let me go quietly, and I'll come back in time."

"In time for what?" said Mrs. Richardson, simply.

"Oh, I didn't mean in time for anything. I daresay nothing will go out of joint owing to my absence."

"Well," said Mrs. Richardson with a sigh, "if you were my own son, Graham, I don't know that I could feel more interest in you, but I can't expect to tie you to my apron-string."

"If you could, mamma, you would be eager to get me untied again. I doubt I'm what Mrs. Dods would call a restless pennyworth." That day Mrs. Richardson wrote to her brother, asking to know what was the breach between him and Graham, relating the Hamburg plan, and generally giving vent to her anxiety regarding her stepson and his affairs. It was not without a pang that Mr. Grant read this letter, but he answered there was no breach between him and Graham—there was a reason, which he expected would blow over, why Graham did not

feel so cordially to him; that he approved of his going to Hamburg, and that the likelihood was he would be back before he was too perfect in the language.

CHAPTER LVI.

GRAHAM did not go back to Berwick Street; he was burning the boats of his memory behind him. He bade Miss Barclay good-bye in a very tender, humble note. He asked her to forgive him for wounding her feelings, as he was afraid he had done; his only excuse was his own mad selfishness at the moment. Would she write to him now and then? and would she bid other friends good-bye for him? The words were few and simple, but they carried comfort to Barbara's heart; would have done so, even if she had not found herself despised and forsaken, except by the very few. For the suspicion of her crime in many minds, and the certainty of it in more, hung over her like a shadow, deeper almost than the shadow of death, and there seemed to be no emerging from it; and it now began to tell on her health and spirits as it never had done hitherto.



She must make an effort, and feeling unequal to pioneering her household in a strange land, among people with a strange language, her mother agreed to go to a Devonshire village Miss Dobbie often spoke of with enthusiasm, she having seen it one summer day in her youth. Thither accordingly they betook themselves, towards the end of the gloomiest November that had ever yet been for them. But Miss Barclay revived. It seemed in this remote place as if she had got out from under the curse of Cain. Whether it was that the people had never heard of her and her trial, or, having heard, had forgotten it as a thing of no interest to them, certain it was that here she walked out, and met with friendly greeting from the few passers by. At first it moved her so that she sat down on a stone and burst into tears of pity and thankfulness. Hers was a hard lot, surely it was a hard lot! and here they were far from Mr. Grant. But many a letter passed between Bessie and him, unknown to Miss Barclay. Bessie arranged it so, to spare her aunt's feelings. She was above a clandestine action; but having promised never to marry Mr. Grant without her

aunt's consent, she felt she had done all that—and a great deal more than—was reasonable, and that which she would not have done had the circumstances been ordinary. The winter was a mild one; and the many winding lanes were filled with spring-flowers as if by magic, and in wandering about together Miss Barclay and her niece almost resumed the old relations. If the past could only have been all annihilated—blotted out; if they had never seen Mr. Grant; if only the fatal summons to Miss Boston, that had come two short years ago, had never been sent, or had not been complied with; if—if—if— So thought Barbara; but there it was, all fixed as in the book of fate.

Mr. Grant always wrote cheerfully and hopefully to Bessie, but he was far from feeling cheerful and hopeful. Her letters came to him so simple, so pure, so natural, and so loving, that it seemed always as if a delicious draught were held to his thirsty lips, and yet he was never to taste it. He loved the child as he had never loved a human being, and yet he was separated from her. Child as she was, she had taken her stand, and no persuasion of his—if



he could have brought himself to persuade her to leave her aunt—no persuasion of his could have induced her to do it.

A year and a half had elapsed since Miss Boston's death, and still the mystery hung dark as ever, and in all likelihood would take its place among the ghastly stories of the country. He had even found that one of his servants took a round of half-a-mile in going a message, rather than pass Blindpits after dark. It bade fair that his fate and Bessie's was to be that they should creep farther and farther into the deep, dark shadow. He, like Miss Barclay, was driven up to wish that Dr. M'Vicar had never written that note—that the intercourse which had lapsed for so many years had never been renewed.

It was a bleak day in April, with an east wind that put white curly wigs on the heads of the waves racing to the shore, occasional sunshine without warmth, and a rattle of hail shot from a black cloud, every now and then. Heatherburgh was not famous for a genial climate or early springs. Mr. Grant had been riding fast, but Meg had

slackened pace, and was walking leisurely along the road that passed Blindpits. If, as was said, Miss Boston's ghost haunted it, did that ghost recognise John Simpson? and if so, how did it feel? Was it aware of the shaggy dirty children that swarmed in her premises? of the squalid washing that held possession of her bushes by day and by night? or of the smell of fierce tobacco that ascended on the evening air, and penetrated even to the late lady's chamber? The ghost must have been a very mild, diluted, strained edition of the deceased, if, conscious of all these things, it made no sign. The rags and the tobacco were of themselves enough to have put Miss Boston's ghost distraught.

But John and his descendants were ghost-proof as long as they sat rent-free. Mr. Grant gazed at the house as he passed, and he could have believed that the whole dark history was a dream. Meg had been so long accustomed to stop at the gate, that even yet she needed a hint to make her pass it. And this old house was the casket that had held the jewel he had *timed* almost without hope of ever finding again! Looking at the windows, he could fancy he



saw his old friend watching his coming, the strongly marked aged face peering out of her cap—a peculiar cap, always the same, and made after her own design ; the familiar voice, ready to hail him, also after her own fashion. But no ; Miss Boston had passed away ; and she, and such as she, have no successors. They belong to a condition of things nearly as strange to the present generation as if they had lived before the flood. Slowly and musingly Mr. Grant passed by.

He was at some distance when he heard his name shouted excitedly, and looking round, he saw Dr. M'Vicar at the gate, waving his hat, and continuing to shout, " Grant—Grant—Grant, I say."

Mr. Grant turned Meg, and was beside him in an instant.

" What is it, doctor ? What's the matter ?"

" Matter ? the child's dying," he said in a kind of joyous excitement. " They were too late of sending ; nothing can save her—nothing."

" Whose child ?" said Mr. Grant, looking at the doctor's face in bewilderment. How could a child's death be the cause of the doctor's beaming face ?

" Well, it's hard for them, no doubt—Simpson's

grandchild; but there will be proof, full proof. I always said it would come out. I never believed it. She's poisoned, poisoned with arsenic, and we'll get to the bottom of it."

The ashy hue came into Mr. Grant's face and overspread it. He leaned on the wall.

"Goodness!" said Dr. M'Vicar. "Grant, you have not heart disease, have you? Are you going to faint?"

"Not that I know of," said Mr. Grant, slowly. "Will this throw light on Miss Boston's death?"

"Every light, all the light we need. Not a doubt of it; the child has been poisoned accidentally with arsenic, so was Miss Boston; and we'll find out how. It's very sad about the child, of course; but the suffering will soon be over, and the proof will be complete. Come in and we'll talk it over."

"John," cried the doctor, in the brisk voice of authority, "take Mr. Grant's horse round to the stable."

The old man appeared with a red cowl on his head, and a pipe in his mouth, and led Meg to the familiar stall.

"Now!" and the doctor led the way into the kitchen.

The child was lying on a bed in a small closet, moaning out its life. The chronic washing had been going on earlier in the day; the tub was standing on a turned-up chair with dirty clothes soaking in dirty suds; the place was in disorder. The mother, with her gown turned up, and wet apron, and sodden hands, was hanging over the child, crying—

"Jeanie, my ain wee Jeanie! O Jeanie, Jeanie!"

"Come, my good woman," said the doctor, "tell Mr. Grant how it happened. As a Justice of the Peace you had better hear it from her own lips," he said to Mr. Grant.

"Doctor!" cried the woman, grasping his arm, "can naething be done; naething mair? Oh, save my bairn!"

"I've done all that can be done. If I had been sent for sooner"——

"Dinna say it—dinna say that! I've killed my bairn! I was thrang, and no noticing what they were doing. O doctor, try something else!"

"How often have I told you that nothing more can be done?" said the doctor, somewhat sharply.

"May be if she were raised up she would be easier," said Mr. Grant; and he went to the bed, and lifted the child gently in his arms.

"O sir, do you think she's deein'? I thought it was just some bit common colic."

"Poor little thing! I don't think she is suffering much now," said Mr. Grant.

"No," said Dr. M'Vicar; "you may lay her down; she's dead."

The mother gave a mournful cry, and sank on a chair.

"Come," said the doctor; "we've all to submit, you know; and you have plenty of mouths to fill, I'm sure."

The woman did not speak; likely she did not hear this consolatory view of her case, which grated on Mr. Grant's ears.

"Doctor," he said, when they had gone to the parlour, "that poor woman is in great distress; you might have had more patience with her."

"True," said the doctor, "but I'm so often badgered with ignorant, unreasonable, irrational creatures, that I've learned to take the shortest cut. Job never

was medical adviser to the poor of three parishes. Satan should have given him that post. They're always sending when there's nothing the matter, and when it's anything serious, of course we never hear of it till it is too late. We'll have a *post-mortem* examination as soon as possible."

"How did she get the arsenic?"

"That's it!" said the doctor triumphantly. "The child had been in that closet where they keep their pots and pans, and got on the floor something she thought was a sweetie. She ate it, and found other two which she did not eat, and there they are;" and he put on the table two small bits of a white substance half the size of a pea, which looked like minute pebbles. They were granulated arsenic.

"Now," he said, "there's a clue; let us follow it up."

"It may lead to something, but all it proves is that there's arsenic in the house," said Mr. Grant.

"And has been, I suspect, for many years," said the doctor. "Since I came, the child's father tells me that an old servant of Miss Boston's, a man who was a shepherd with her, told him this forenoon that they

used to have arsenic, which they employed in a sheep-wash, and it lay on the highest shelf in that closet. Of course it was put away years ago, but some of it must have got between the shelf and the wall and fallen down; that's the only way to account for it. No such thing as arsenic has been ever purchased by Simpson or any of his family."

"Supposing it was in the house, how did it get into Miss Boston's soup?"

"That's exactly what we have to find out. I'm going to see the woman Bogle immediately. I'll bring something out of her, I don't doubt."

"Who is she?"

"Why, Bell. You know Bell, Miss Boston's servant. She married the ploughman at Mossbank more than a year ago. She hasn't been very well. I saw her yesterday, and she'll be none the worse of another visit."

"I wish I could be as sanguine as you, doctor; but so much hangs on it. What do you expect to bring out of her? Let us understand what you mean to do?"

"I want to bring out that some of that arsenic

that used to be on the shelf got into Miss Boston's soup by accident. I always believed it was accident."

"I've always tried to believe that," said Mr. Grant, musingly. "I've always believed Miss Barclay innocent; but if Bell let arsenic into the soup by accident, would she not have told, or, at least, would it not have come out, so thoroughly sifted as the evidence was?"

"Do you think we should let it alone?" said the doctor sharply.

"No, certainly not; but I'm afraid to hope. Come, I'll go with you to Mossbank. If this should clear up the mystery, I'm afraid I shall hardly mourn that child's death."

"What will your son say, Mr. Grant? what will your son say?" And the doctor rubbed his hands almost in glee, as he anticipated the triumph he should have over his son-in-law, who plumed himself so highly on his sharp insight and sagacity.

They walked on without speaking. Bell hailed the doctor without much ceremony, her thoughts being—"The body, he's gaun to mak' a job o' me!" She said to Mr. Grant—

"It's sae lang since I've seen ye, sir; ye bring the auld mistress to my mind. Sic a business as that was!—to think that wi' a' her spunk she was sent off the world before her time."

"Mr. Grant and I were just speaking of it as we came along. Miss Barclay has left Ironburgh at last; no wonder."

"But it's hard on her," said Bell. "I canna say I liket her. She was ane o' your awfu' gude folk, that hae nae sympathy wi' onything short o' perfection. The auld mistress was worth a dizzen o' her; but I'm sure she never committed murder. I never thocht it, an' I dinna think it yet."

"Then what did you think, Bell?" said the doctor eagerly. "You must have had some reason for not thinking it."

"Weel, nane in particular, except that I didna think it."

"But did your mind never suggest any explanation?"

"Weel, I've whiles wondered if Miss Boston didna tak' it hersel'—that's in a mistake, ye ken."

The doctor shook his head.

"By-the-by," he said, "that's a sad death at Blindpits just now."

"No auld John Simpson? I didna hear o't."

"No; one of his grandchildren, after a few hours' illness."

"What was the matter, doctor?"

"She was poisoned with arsenic, just as Miss Boston was."

"Preserve me!" cried Bell, "the place is no canny."

"It looks like it; but this was an accident. Do you not think it possible that Miss Boston's death was accidental?"

"Yes; I've said I thought she took it hersel' by mistake."

Mr. Grant had left all the speaking to the doctor, and employed himself watching Bell's face, but if she really knew anything her looks did not betray her.

"I would give much," said he, "to get at the truth about it, for it has not come to light yet I'm certain. Arsenic was kept in that kitchen closet years ago. It seems the child got grains of it on the floor,

swallowed them and died. Now, is it not possible that some of that arsenic got into Miss Boston's soup by accident?"

Bell's eyes flashed up. "Do you mean, Mr. Grant, that I had ony hand in it, accident or no accident? I ken naething of it—naething, if I should never draw anither breath."

"The boy Davie, you know? I suppose he never intermeddled with the pots or pans," said the doctor.

"Weel, he whiles made his ain parritch if I was thrang; but he's to be here in this house the night, on his road to a fine place about Eastburgh that he's gotten. If ye wad like to backspeer him, I'll send him to ye in the morning, or to Mr. Grant; ony way ye like."

"I would like to see him," said the doctor.

"Ay, he's got a good place, has he? You'll not know the name of the people he's going to."

"No; but he's to be groom, wi' a laddie under him. A free house, wi' coals, and gas, and 25s. a-week. My word! I was telling Geordie haudin' the pleugh was a puir business beside it. An'

Davie's hardly twenty ; but he's been brushed up for a year at the castle."

" Well, Mrs. Bogle, mind flannel on the chest, as I was telling you yesterday. Take care of yourself ; an ounce of care is worth a pound of drugs."

" Whisht, whisht, doctor ! it's no for you to say that," and with a cordial laugh the doctor left Mrs Bogle.

Mr. Grant said—" Send David to me to-morrow at ten o'clock."

" My word ! he'll no be ill to send. There was naething he used to like better than the chance o' haudin' your horse."

" We've not made much of that, doctor," said Mr. Grant, as they walked away again.

" Patience, patience, patience !" said the doctor. " I'm accustomed to wait for results."

" Wait ! I'm sick of waiting."

" I'm not," said the doctor. " I've more at stake than you. You want Miss Barclay cleared. I want myself cleared of having been imposed upon by as decent-looking a woman as ever lived. What will John say when he's proved in the wrong ? He'll

walk a little more softly in future." And the doctor chuckled.

"I would give all Miss Boston's money twice told to have him proved in the wrong; not exactly to teach him wisdom, however," said Mr. Grant.

David was somewhat late in arriving at Mossbank. He had walked twenty miles from the place to which his father and stepmother had removed recently; and then he had paid a visit to Ashburn Cottage, not to the Misses Stark, but to the rare and radiant maiden whom the Misses Stark named Betsy, of whose services, through David's wiles, they were ere long to be deprived.

After exchanging all the news, and hearing his old friend Bell ramble on about everything in a kind of excited way, which made him wonder if she had begun to drink, he and his hosts retired for the night. Being out of his tranquil ordinary mood, and possessed with the thoughts of the Misses Stark's treasure, he could not sleep; and he found himself, whether he liked or not, in the position of a listener to the conjugal talk of Mr. and Mrs. Bogle, being divided from them by only a wooden partition. But

hearing what fixed his attention, he listened with all his might.

"I say, Geordie, I canna sleep, and I maun speak."

"Weel, speak."

"M'Vicar was here to-day, and Grant the factor."

"Ye've tellt us that often eneuch."

"But I havena tellt ye what they were here about."

"Was't onything particular?"

"They wanted to mak' out that I poisoned Miss Boston by accident ; and, Geordie, I did do it."

"The woman's in a creel !"

"They spoke o' the bairn getting arsenic in the closet. I was cleaning out the closet that day, as I weel mind ; and I was standing on a table setting the things on the shelf again, when my hand cam' on what I thought was some wee chunky stanes. I stood playing wi' them in my hand, and havoring to Peter Pettigrew, and threw ane o' them to the fire-place. The pan wi' the mistress's beef-tea was on the fire, and I saw it fa' into it. I put the rest on

the shelf, and I was just steppin' down to take it out o' the pan, when Miss Barclay came to the kitchen, and I thought nae mair o't till the hulla-bulloo got up, and I minded then. I gaed to the shelf, and got the three bits o' white things lying where I left them; and to put mysel' out o' doubt, I gied them to twa o' the hens, and the beasts baith died."

"What way did ye no tell at the time?" said Geordie, sternly.

"I was in mortal fear; but I wad hae tellt if Miss Barclay had been condemned. I thought they might no believe I did it by chance; and I thocht, Geordie, that ye wad leave me;" and Bell clinched her argument with a sob.

"Woman! ye should hae tellt at a' risks," said the softened Geordie.

"It's easy speakin'. They might no hae believed that I did it by chance. But it's lain on my conscience, and I but to tell ye. I couldna keep it ony langer."

"Weel, a' that ye can do now is to gang before

a magistrate, and mak' a clean breast o't, so far as I can see."

"I wonder to hear ye speak. Do ye think I'm gaun to mak' mysel' a speak in the country after the hale thing's blawn ower? What sense would there be in kicking up anither dust about it?"

"Bell, Bell, hae ye nae pity on the puir leddy that's lost her gude name?"

"The like o' her is better able to stand it than me, Geordie; and, forbye, the warst o't's ower."

And they went on arguing the point—Bell using all feminine wiles to induce her lord to keep silence, and he giving in so far as to promise he would take time to think of it. It might have been thought that an honest man like Bogle would have been disgusted on discovering his wife's duplicity; but, given an ordinary man with an averagely smart woman as his wife, and he will see all objects as dexterously manipulated by her. The secret, however, had passed beyond their keeping. David did not intend to divulge it though, he would leave that to Bogle; having shared their hospitality, he could not go directly and repeat what he was now sorry he had

overheard. But he went to keep his appointment with Mr. Grant, and it was a dangerous freight for a simple youth to carry with him into the presence of Mr. Grant and the doctor, who was also in waiting to receive him. Accordingly, not a very fierce fire of cross-questioning brought the whole thing out.

That day the two men went at the dinner-hour, and got Bogle and his wife together, and without saying anything of David's information, they drew forth the confession. Had Bell been alone, she would have brazened it out; but George was not her equal in histrionic powers; even if he had been a rogue, instead of an honest man, he would probably have betrayed her and himself.

Each left the house with a written copy of Bell's confession, signed by her, in his pocket. Dr. M'Vicar rode home in high glee. He called nearly everywhere, spreading the news, and everywhere he repeated—"I always knew it, few faces deceive me." But his crowning triumph was when he confronted his son-in-law and partner.

Mary said—"Papa, that's the best news you have brought us for many a day; how comforting it is to

find that no one is guilty, least of all Miss Barclay ! It shook one's faith in human nature so horribly. Poor Miss Boston ! to think she was the victim of an accident after all."

John, who had been listening to the doctor's triumphant detail in the coolest silence, said—"Don't make too sure of that, Mary; how many people claimed to be Ridley's murderer (a notorious crime that had taken place some months before); the fact is, I believe Bell's nerves have been shaken, and the thing has preyed on her to such a pitch that she fancies she did it. Doctor, I suspect you have come on a mare's nest."

Dr. M'Vicar was highly exasperated.

"Oh, I hope not, John," said Mary. "I do hope papa is right; it looks such a natural explanation, too."

"Yes, I'm right, Mary; John may go and examine the mare's nest for himself; it will stand examination, I promise him. Mr. Grant and I have taken steps to have the whole thing legally sifted, and have the truth established beyond a cavil."

thing to be sure that every one is innocent of a cold-blooded, horrible crime?" said Mary.

"Oh, of course, when it can be done; but what was Bell Bogle's word worth even when she had all her senses, which she seems to have lost?"

"She has all her senses, John, and did not intend to make her confession public, but circumstances were too many for her; and we don't depend on her word alone; there are corroborative incidents we know of, and more will come out. Depend upon it, we'll clear Miss Barclay and our own doors of a cruel, unnatural crime; and I knew we would some time—I always knew it."

"It will take a good many corroborative incidents to convince me and the public of the woman's innocence," said the younger doctor, drily.

"Well, you'll get them—you'll get them."

"We'll see; credulity is not the vice of the age."

CHAPTER LVII.

MR. GRANT went home, and enclosed his copy of the confession to Miss Barclay, with a brief note; he said—

“ Dear Miss Barclay—Dr. M‘Vicar has the great satisfaction of finding the clue to the mystery of Miss Boston’s death. He and I went to Mrs. Bogle to-day, and I send you her confession, signed by herself. The explanation seems so simple, we ought to have thought of it sooner. The doctor and I will take the necessary steps in the matter. In case any of your friends, on such an occasion, should wish your photograph, there is a large impression lying in my office here, which I succeeded in arresting before they were sown broadcast in all the print-shops. Bell professes great penitence; she had need.—I am, always sincerely yours,

JAMES GRANT.”

one afternoon, the few people they had met had passed silently, and turned to gaze on them. One child Miss Barclay had been accustomed to speak to ran off in an unaccountable and frightened way—unaccountable, except by supposing that the fatal story had got wind even here. And so it was. None of them remarked on these circumstances to the other, but they sat in silence in these pleasant rooms, except for the chirrup of Miss Dobbie, which, since the dark days, had often seemed painfully out of place. At length Mrs. Barclay broke the silence; she said—

“Why should we suffer longer? let us change our name; then we would be secure.”

“Yes,” said Miss Dobbie; “I would take the name too, that would make us doubly secure, and we could choose a pretty name when we are choosing; I never liked Dobbie, Barclay is better. Devereux or Tollemache, or any distinguished name out of the peerage.”

“I wouldn’t,” said Bessie, her eyes flashing; “I

wouldn't give in, it would be as good as confessing our guilt. We'll brave it out and live it down."

Barbara smiled sadly, and Mrs. Barclay shook her head and sighed.

"It's all very well, Bessie," said Miss Dobbie, "for you, who are young and brave; but we, who have been shaken by the storms of life so often, must feel that if a little comfort could be got by such simple means as changing our names, we ought to do it."

"Comfort! I despise it on such terms."

"Perhaps the feeling does you honour, my dear; but we, who are past our first jeunesse, find it hard to be pointed at with the finger of scorn."

Just then the little maid who waited on them came into the room, and handed a letter to Miss Barclay. There was a mingling of fear, and pity, and curiosity in the girl's face as she did so, wholly unlike any expression she had worn before. Each of the lodgers saw it for herself, and winced again in silence. Glancing at the back of the letter, Bessie knew Mr. Grant's writing at once, and she trembled for the effect it might have on her aunt. If she had got it first she would have suppressed it. Could he not



she smiled. She held out the letter : " Read," she said, and rising she left the room. Bessie snatched the letter ; she jumped up.

" Grandmamma, grandmamma, aunt's cleared !"

" And who did it ?"

" Bell ; Bell, by accident. What should be done to that woman for making us wade through such a sea of anguish ?"

Grandmamma, with trembling hands, was fumbling out her spectacles. " Where's Barbara ? where's she gone ? read the thing, Bessie ? I thought it was some new horror."

" The substance is that Bell did it by accident, and aunt is as clear as noonday. See, Miss Dobbie, read it to grandmamma ; I must find aunt."

She rushed to her aunt's room.

" Aunt, are you not awfully happy ?"

" No, Bessie, not awfully happy. I am deeply thankful ; but though wounds heal, the scars remain.

Can I forget that most of the people who knew me believed me capable of murdering an old helpless woman in her bed?"

"But the evidence, aunt; think of the evidence. I must say, ever since, when we've been at meals, I have allowed you to begin first, in case, you know, there should have been anything extra, you know, in the food."

"Bessie, your joke is ill-timed."

"Without a joke, auntie, I don't wonder at people believing it."

"People that knew me! My whole life gave it the lie," said Barbara, with slightly bitter emphasis.

"Auntie," said Bessie softly, "I know a person whom you believed to be guilty, without any very conclusive evidence."

The blood rushed again to Barbara's face.

"I regret it, Bessie—I deeply regret it; but it appeared to me so self-evident. Mr. Grant, it seems, has done me a service I was not aware of. He will not find me ungrateful, I trust."

Her voice faltered in the very least.



"You'll let me marry him now?" Bessie whispered.

"I still think him too old for you, my darling."

"It's not he who is too old, 'tis I who am too young. It can't be helped. But we must go beside grandmamma, and I must write. What should be done to that creature Bell? If she could comprehend the torture she has put us to!"

"She is quite incapable of arriving at even a distant approximation to my feelings in the situation her base conduct placed me in."

The four ladies for once all agreed that the sooner they got back to Berwick Street the better, and the very next morning saw them *en route* for home.

CHAPTER LVIII.

YET a little while and Graham, going home from his office in Hamburg to his lodgings, found this letter lying for him :—

“Dear Mr. Richardson—I know you will be right glad to hear the news, the glorious news, I have to tell. The mystery is cleared up, and aunt vindicated to the world. I float in air. Aunt takes it quietly, as you will suppose ; but she feels it deeply for all that. When she thought I was sleeping, I heard her sobbing in the night. I don’t go into particulars ; you’ll see them in the newspapers. Aunt has seen Mr. Grant. Perhaps we were plunged into all that misery to make our happiness more thoroughly exquisite ; but I am too happy to speculate. When are you coming back ? We should all be glad to see you.—I am, yours most sincerely,

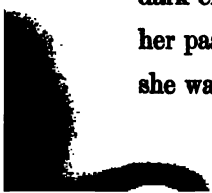
“BESSIE BARCLAY.”



This selfishly innocent note made Graham wince in bitter anger. If she had not written, or if in writing she had done anything but pick him up on the old terms, ignoring his feelings altogether when her own happiness overflowed; but his love was too true to let that mood continue. "She can't know," he said, "how can she know, what she has cost me. It is I who am selfish;" and he took up the note and read it again, with a tender sadness, and sat down to answer it.

"Dear Bessie," he said, "your news are good indeed. I am heartily glad that your aunt is set straight in the eyes of the world; in mine she never needed vindication. I do not know when I shall be in Ironburgh; but with best wishes for you all, I am, dear Bessie, yours truly, G. RICHARDSON."

Then he walked about his room for a long time. He could see Bessie's girlish rapture deepened by the dark experience she had had, and Mr. Grant leading her past the great clipt evergreens into the old house she was to transform into home for him; and Miss



Barclay shedding tears over the restoration of her good name, such as she had never shed over its loss. A day or two later he got another letter :—

“Dear Sir—I think it due to the great friendship you showed me at a time when friends were few, to inform you that at length the mystery is unravelled. My old friend, Miss Boston, was the victim of an accident. I have no patience to think of the woman through whose guilty silence I was subjected to such suffering ; but I try to forgive her, and to look beyond her to the Source of all our trials, from whom it was sent to teach me some lesson, no doubt, which I trust I shall not be slow to learn. The house at Blindpits is being thoroughly repaired, and we shall remove there as soon as it is ready to receive us. I do not acknowledge that, in the circumstances, I was very guilty in wronging Mr. Grant as I did ; but it has been to me the occasion of much regret. When I apologised to him, he said, ‘Oh, nonsense, never speak of it.’ Thus, some people can take lightly what would be matter of life and death to others. Unless you return soon we shall not have the pleasure of



seeing you here again ; but I trust we shall resume our intercourse very frequently at Blindpits.—I remain yours very sincerely,

“BARBARA BARCLAY.”

Then in the beginning of May came a letter from Mr. Dods. It was a long letter ; but Graham saw only one thing in it, and that was the sentence in which he said, “Bessie is to be married to Mr. Grant this month ; the day I have not heard yet. The gudewife says he might be her father ; but he’ll take the better care of her. I aye thought you would put in for her, but it seems no. Pettigrew, who is sometimes about Heatherburgh, was telling the gudewife that there has been a terrible row between Mr. Grant and his son about it ; but I think the old man had a right to please himself—not that he is so old either, if she were not so young, and a kind of pet among us all. But it’s a good marriage for her, and I wish her much happiness,” etc.

Graham put away the letter, and sat down to a volume of history he was studying ; but his head buzzed. He read all the words, but the sense he

made nothing of: he was thinking it was something not to know the day of the marriage.

Towards the end of the month, one of his acquaintances, who had a sister in Rotterdam, proposed to him that they should spend a few holidays by going to see that city. It was all one to Graham what he did with his holiday, and he assented. They traversed the streets, and were standing in the presence of Erasmus, when there appeared coming towards them a gentleman and a lady, who were too busy speaking to notice anyone. Graham had a full view of them, and he would have known either if he had only had a glimpse. His knees shook under him, and he turned and went away in the opposite direction, to the surprise of his companion, who stayed and took his fill of the statue, and of the foreign couple who were also "doing" it. When he got up to Graham again, he said, "Why so fast? did yon pretty girl frighten you? She is a countrywoman of yours, travelling with her papa, and they are gathering useful information; but they don't know the language, and I had the pleasure of helping them. If you had



not run away, you might have been useful. Come, why did you run away?"

"They were people I knew, and had no wish to meet."

"You speak in riddles. Did you attempt to steal the young lady's affections, and papa did not approve?"

"He is not her father; he is her—husband."

"Her husband! Was she smitten by the almighty dollar, and did she jilt your worship?"

"Neither—simply I did not wish to meet them," said Graham in tones that put an end to the subject.

The youth struck into many themes; and being a great speaker, he did not object to having brief answers, and what appeared close attention from Graham. He had been eloquent upon Goethe for some time; and when they parted he took a volume from his pocket and said, "Did you ever read this? it is not his best work at all, but whatever he wrote is worth reading."

"What is it?"

"The Sorrows of Werter."

“No; and I would like to read it.”

And when he sat down alone, he opened the book, and was fascinated, and went on to the end, when he tossed it away. “He was a poor creature,” he thought; “a poor creature, gilded though he is with Goethe’s genius.” Glued as he had been to the pages, he could not help feeling as if his own emotions were caricatured in them. “Why did not Goethe give his hero a backbone of sense and principle?” He rose, and, as it were, shook himself free—free from sickly repining, free to do his work in the world with a whole heart; and his spirit grew light, as if a burden had been thrown off. But many a time thereafter the bitterness of his disappointment returned upon him with almost its first force. And he opened his home letters reluctantly, feeling that, if there was anything of interest in them, they would only quicken his dull pain. But he was not oppressed with letters. His stepmother was no scribe, and expected him to write pretty frequently without a regular rejoinder. Mr. Dods wrote at intervals, and so did Miss Barclay. For two or three times he had opened Barbara’s letters with

the best of paper, and sealed in a deft, lady-like manner ; but they wanted entirely the Promethean spark. "One careless line of Bessie's," he thought, "would have been instinct with mind and heart."

From motives of delicacy, Miss Barclay never mentioned Bessie or her husband ; and from delicacy likewise, she never wrote of her own occupations or doings ; and what was left her but to frame sentences of a model kind ? She was not like the spider, which can spin a web out of its own bowels. Nor did he even hear from Mr. or Mrs. Grant. Likely they were engulphed in their own happiness. But by chance he alighted on a nugget. He had not heard from John Grant for a long time ; and it struck him to write to Mary a short note of inquiry only, and in return he got a long sisterly letter, full of heart, and giving him all the kindly gossip of the place. Having no knowledge to restrain her, she enlarged on the happiness of Mr. Grant and his

young wife, and Graham tried not to wince like Werter; and, in time, got accustomed to hear of "my father-in-law and his wife" as prominent figures in Mary's letters.

And she told how the ladies at Blindpits got on; how affable Mrs. Barclay and Miss Dobbie were; how Miss Barclay employed herself in continually doing good; how she never wanted guests, and those of a kind not commonly run after—homeless governesses, needing change of air and rest—delicate bleached-looking children from the east end of Ironburgh; and it was whispered even that visitors had been received direct from the Ironburgh jail and some penitentiary. "I envy," said Mary, "I am wicked enough sometimes to envy Miss Barclay the scope she has for doing good. And she is just cut out for it. Her strong practical sense and kindness of heart are the very qualities needed. Once she said to me, 'At one time I was very much of a Pharisee. If I did not say, I am sure I felt, in the stand-by-I-am-holier-than-thou fashion; and I had little sympathy even with goodness, unless of a particular pattern, and none at all with creatures

who had lapsed into crime. Even yet I have a fight with the Pharisee; but during that time'—[you know what time she means]—'I must have sunk altogether but for the kindness some people showed me, and the confidence they reposed in me; and if I, who had conscious innocence as a support, needed something more, surely kindness and sympathy is the way to thaw frozen guilty natures.'

"And her sense prevents her going off in very Quixotic efforts, or being often imposed on, although to me it appears better to be often imposed on than that one deserving case should be sent empty away. Deserving!—who are we to talk of deserts? I hate that phrase 'the deserving poor'—the cosy self-complacent people patting on the shoulder the very flower of Christ's flock.

"I called on Bell Bogle the other day, and she let me see Miss Barclay's photograph—Miss Barclay having called and given it to her, the tears were in her eyes, and I thought she had the impression that much had been forgiven her; but John says her health is in such a shaky state just now that she could shed tears about anything or nothing. I told

Mrs. Grant of it, and she said that her aunt was always too good for this world. For all that there is not the close intercourse between Blindpits and Grantsburn that you would think. Miss Barclay is shy of Mr. Grant—not, I daresay, that she does not respect him highly, but I think she had poured her very heart's blood into her love for her niece, and she feels the great change now that she belongs wholly to another. Ah, Graham! it is a dangerous thing to love; sooner or later disappointment comes; your idol is not what you suppose, or fate separates you, or something; the thorough dove-tailing of two natures is rare, surely. Of course, I speak in general. I don't mean that John is not everything I could wish; but then he has his profession, and it takes up most of his time and attention. After all, this quiet letter-writing between you and me is a very happy thing; we don't embark too much in it, and if it comes to grief we shall survive. You'll think that a cool sort of friendship, but it will last and not make importunate demands, and that is much. Write me a long letter; you know I have not much to occupy



my time, and I judge from your tone that you are perhaps a little lonely.—Yours,

“MARY GRANT.”

Then Graham knew that John Grant's wife was not altogether happy, and his kind heart ached for her, and the correspondence went on and was a comfort to both.

CHAPTER LIX.

AT the end of a year and a half Graham was summoned home by the death—sudden in the end—of his step-mother. Why should he fear to meet Mr. Grant?—he had got over that—or Bessie? he was steeled now, steeled against any relapse into his former feelings. Bessie might cut bread and butter for a whole juvenile party, and he could see her, he was sure, without any species of Werterism coming over him.

He went straight to Mrs. Richardson's house, and was received by Miss Grant, who since her brother's marriage had lived with her sister. She was in deep grief, but not so absorbed that she did not feel it a consolation to have Graham with her. He was one of the family, and she could talk freely to him about anything.

"Well, Graham," she said, "it would have been a satisfaction to my poor sister if she could have

seen you before her death, but it was not to be it seems."

"If I could have known"——

"Ah! but you could not know; we are short-sighted creatures indeed, but reason tells us her death is not to be lamented. She had very little health, and she is gone where all her trials and vexations are over."

"I am very sorry"——

"No, don't be sorry; but you can't know what we have suffered since you went away—the grief and vexation"——

"Indeed! I did not know—what about?"

"The vexation my brother has given us."

"What! Mr. Grant—how?"

"With that wretched foolish marriage." Graham started. "If he had only married any woman of his own age, but a girl—a child without the slightest experience—a man of his sense and age, for I blame him, what could she know? only her friends ought to have prevented it; then the notoriety of the aunt; really there was no circumstance wanting to complete our mortification."

"I thought always that you and my mother were well pleased. She never wrote anything to the contrary."

"What would have been the use? it would not have mended matters. Not that we had any selfish feelings about it, if he had only married suitably. You don't know, perhaps, that a year ago an old friend of my sister's left her a good deal of money. She, poor woman! made her will only last week, and she gives a large share of it to you. This house and all else belongs to me. No; we were quite independent. Our grief was for him, after living so long as he did, to do such a foolish thing at last—the country rang with it for weeks."

"As for the country ringing with it, what did it matter? If he and his wife are happy, whose business is it to find fault?—Neither yours nor mine, auntie," and his voice softened, for he knew that in degree Miss Grant was also suffering, from having lost the one object of her life. I did not know I was to come back to find myself rich. I only wish my mother had lived to enjoy it."

"We could all wish that; but in this world we

don't often get our wishes ; and no doubt it is better for us. When we do get them, we are sometimes caught in our own snare, as witness my brother."

"If you mean his marriage, aunt, it was the sweetest snare ever a man fell into. I have known Bessie—Mrs. Grant I mean—for years, and she has not a fault."

"She is ridiculously young for him. If, with all her notoriety, he had even married the aunt, it would have been more rational."

"Why, how could she help her notoriety? If you had been at Blindpits when Miss Boston died, you would have probably shared it. When I think of all she suffered"——

"It was her misfortune, no doubt, and she was much to be pitied. But one would rather give such a story a wide berth. Now, confess you would prefer marrying into a less celebrated family?"

"I'm not in a mood for confession," he said, feeling his very inmost history was being played upon by ignorant unsympathetic fingers.

Mr. Grant met Graham precisely as if they had

never parted, and Graham did his best to follow his example. When the sad business that brought them to Eastburgh was over, they went together to Heatherburgh.

Mr. Grant talked of Graham's future, and cross-questioned him as to his views. Did he wish such a situation as his, Mr. Grant's? Graham said such situations were difficult to be had; if such a one came in his way he might take it, but he had no expectation it would. Mr. Grant said he would look out for him, and he would have all the Marquis's influence. Whereupon Graham muttered something about being obliged—a feeling he had not at the moment; and Mr. Grant took no notice, and passed to indifferent things.

At the station Meg was waiting her master. The time was October again, two years from that memorable one when Graham went abroad to learn German and the more difficult art of forgetfulness. He seemed in a dream. The little quiet station, the people belonging to it, Mr. Grant, his horse, the man holding it, were all as of yore; and he felt as if he must have



Then Graham started. "No," he said, "don't let me detain you. I promised to take up my quarters with Mary and John."

"Nonsense; let them wait, and come with me. Bessie has been counting on having you."

"I'll come to-morrow, not to-night. Give my compliments to Mrs. Grant."

"It's too bad," he said. "Very well, we'll cultivate patience till to-morrow;" and shaking hands heartily, he rode away.

Graham looked after the familiar, centaur-like figure that his boyish eyes had so often gazed at with admiration and pride—that man was going home to Bessie—his wife. He had been two years forging his armour; but if he had gone to Grantsburn that night its temper would have been sorely tried. In truth, now that it had come to the point, he shrank from trying it.

If John Grant and his wife were not the happiest

couple in the world, neither he nor she was wanting to each other in the presence of strangers; and while Graham had virtuously resolved to try to improve Mary's position by making an effort to open her husband's eyes more fully to her merits, and in some shape giving him good advice, he found that Dr. Grant left no visible peg on which to hang a remark. He began to think he must have made a mistake, that his own dreariness had led him to misinterpret the tone of Mary's letters, and he was well pleased to rest in this belief.

"Have you seen my sister yet?" suddenly asked Dr. Grant.

"Your sister!—who is she?—no," said Graham.

"Oh, he means the baby at Grantsburn; it is the dearest little thing; you'll see it to-morrow," said Mary.

"I can tell you it pushes me into the shade," said John. "I'm a poor neglected child. It's an awful thing to have a stepmother!"

Mary laughed. "Yours is a formidable one," she said, "and you are so completely at her mercy."

"Bessie can hold her own," said Dr. M'Vicar,

"which people had need to be able to do in this world."

"If she doesn't hold mine too," said John, "I don't object."

Mary was thinking how she could change the subject, when her husband was called away. Dr. Grant had not got over the sense he had that Miss Barclay's acquittal was his defeat, and he had never forgiven his father's marriage. He had felt compelled by public opinion to say that he was glad Miss Barclay's innocence was proved; but nothing compelled him to look graciously on his father's marriage, and he had no intercourse with Grantsburn beyond what an appearance of civility called for.

He had in vain tried to inoculate his wife with his views on this and other subjects, but Mary had long since taken the measure of her husband's moral nature, and she refused to creep inside that measure; indeed, it was impossible to her. Perhaps it was an earnest of better things that he was awed somewhat by his wife's goodness, and did not unduly push his attempts to make her act according to his standard.

"You'll see," Mary went on, "that Grantsburn

looks better than ever it did; and I am sure that if ever a marriage was made in heaven, that one was. At least it has brought a good deal of heaven to earth with it, and yet John and his aunt can't speak of it with ordinary patience even now."

"Molly," said her father, "how would you like if I were to give you a stepmother?"

"If she was like Bessie, I couldn't object."

"Couldn't you?—you wouldn't mind your father making a fool of himself in his old age? Strangers always take Grant's wife to be his daughter."

"Happiness doesn't depend on the mistakes of strangers, and people may be well matched in point of age, and miserable enough for all that." It is to be hoped that Mary Grant did not speak from her own experience.

"Well," said Dr. M'Vicar, "I did think Grant's marriage a pity, and I'll not bring a young lady here as your stepmamma, Molly; keep your mind easy. It doesn't look so ill now; but twenty years after this"——

"What's the use, papa, of vexing one's-self about twenty years hence? We can't tell what may

be on the morrow. I think every day I count less and less on outward appearance."

Next morning Graham took his way to Blindpits. He found it changed. Miss Barclay had built, and papered, and painted, and refurnished, and anew laid out the garden and shrubbery, till she had brought it well abreast of the age, as Miss Boston had spoken of; and everything was kept in that order which betokens efficient administration and a well-filled purse.

Miss Barclay was sewing, but she put down her work and welcomed Graham very warmly, and she did not take it up again, which he expected her to do, for she had the very good, although to weaker fellow-mortals sometimes the irritating, habit of never being a moment idle. Knowing this, Graham felt the compliment the greater.

"You've made great improvements here," he said, after the first greetings were over, and the awkward pause had come which comes so often when people feel deeply and skim surface topics.

"Yes; I think they are improvements;—they are changes at all events, and served to occupy us when active occupation was an object."

"You're not changed," he said; "I don't see the least difference on you." And indeed the sweet serene face and trim figure did not look a day older.

"Do you not?" she said. "Do you not see the white hairs making their appearance?"

"Yes, I see them. If I were you I would pull them out; you could pull them all out in ten minutes."

"What good end would be served by pulling them out?"

"I really don't know, only it is generally thought they make people look older."

"They don't make people older than they really are, they only indicate that they are older."

"Come," said he, laughing, "don't be strong-minded; if you think it a waste of time to do it, I'll pull them out now, if you'll let me."

"Thank you—weak or strong minded, I can by this time contemplate grey hairs with serenity; Bessie wished to pull them out, but I declined."

"Mrs. Grant is well, I believe," he said rather stiffly. "I came from Eastburgh with Mr. Grant yesterday."

"Yes, she is very well; she is a good deal occupied, and we don't see much of her here."

"You'll miss her?"

"Yes," she said shortly; "I try to make work for myself here, and time passes quickly enough. But what of yourself—where are you, and what are you going to do? tell me."

"I'm here, doing nothing; what I shall do is to be seen; I've done precious little as yet."

"What of your Continental experience? I should like to hear something of the educational system in Germany—female education especially."

"I'm ashamed to say I know nothing about it."

"And their schemes of benevolence"——

Here Miss Barclay was interrupted by the entrance of her mother and Miss Dobbie. These ladies could not be sufficiently delighted at meeting Graham once more.

"And are you," said Mrs. Barclay when the flutter had subsided, "are you as fond of backgammon as ever?" For, like other self-indulgent people, Mrs. Barclay was persuaded that Graham had played so often with her because he was passionately fond of

the game, little dreaming how his patience and good nature had been put to the proof.

"I haven't played a single game since you saw me; you would find me an easy victim after being so long out of practice."

"It would not do to trust to that, but we must try some evening."

"And have you been at Grantsburn?" said Miss Dobbie. "No! then you have not seen how happily settled our dear Bessie is, and what a very sweet baby she has. What changes a little time makes! but they've all been happy changes since you left. You wouldn't expect, when you went away, to find Bessie mistress at Grantsburn when you returned. Did you not get such a pleasant surprise when you heard it?"

"Bessie," put in Mrs. Barclay, "Bessie always had the impression that she saw you, or at least your back, when she was on her wedding-trip; it was at Rotterdam, but you were a long way from Rotterdam, weren't you?"

"Yes, at Hamburg."

"Then she had been mistaken, it seems. And

have you been in Ironburgh; and how are those worthy creatures the Dodses?"

Not having been in Ironburgh, Graham could not tell; and feeling that each of the ladies was remarkably like herself—as, indeed, whom should she be like, and is not that the charm of old friends?—he rose to take his way to Grantsburn, where he thought he would like to find Bessie altogether different from the Bessie of former times, so that the part he had to act might be the easier to him.

CHAPTER LX.

HE did not know whether to be glad or sorry when he fell in with John Grant, who offered to go with him. Upon the whole he was glad, it would be less trying than to meet Bessie alone. She had known him then at Rotterdam !

Yes ; Bessie as it seemed was happily settled for life: What was it to her that her husband was more than twice her own age ; or to him, except that, perhaps, it blended a more exquisite tenderness with his love than it might otherwise have had. She transfigured the world for him.

Graham and Dr. Grant walked along without speaking so much as two such old friends might have been expected to do.

“ You’re a lucky fellow,” said Dr. Grant, “ to spend so much time idle, and then come back to find a handsome legacy.”

"I wasn't altogether idle; and the legacy was certainly a surprise to me."

"So it was to me, and a great one. I think my father's sister might have sent some of it my way; but I am no hand at cozening old ladies."

"You should study the art," said Graham, good-naturedly. "A medical man has golden opportunities for its exercise."

"If one could count on anything women will do; but they change like the wind. I'm sick of them. I'll never have the chance of such a haul from my stepmother. If my father had not made such a fool of himself"——

"Stop, John! Any man would have ennobled himself by marrying Bessie Barclay; and your father deserves something different at your hands than to be spoken of in that way."

"I don't know that. I might as well not have a father; and of course I'll never touch a farthing of his money."

Graham made no rejoinder, and they went slowly on. They were in the walk which led to the house through the herd of clipped yews; the road wound by

the side of the park, and was divided from it by a wire fence. They had only to turn a corner and they would be in sight of the house. John pointed to this corner, and said, "Do you see that hat? That's an odd place for a hat to be lying." Graham was not attending, and did not speak. Likely he was bracing himself for the coming interview.

"See!" cried Grant. "Is that a man's figure in the grass? Some fellow drunk. It's early for that."

They did not hurry till they were within a few steps of the prostrate form, when each suddenly strode forward, and was on his knees by the side of it in a moment.

"My father!" cried John.

"Has he fainted?" cried Graham; and in an instant he was at the burn, filled his hat with water, and brought it to dash on the upturned face lying among the grass. The face did not look ghastly, the tan of the summer's sun prevented that, and there was no sign of pain in it. He might have been sleeping, so peaceful did he look.



John had torn open the vest, and laid his hand on the heart.

"Graham," he said, in a low, awed tone, "it's of no use—he has been dead some time."

"Dead!" echoed Graham; "it's impossible! I parted with him only yesterday in perfect health."

Yesterday! It was little more than an hour since he had left his wife and child watching his retreating figure from the window, since he had turned round and waved his hand to them. And now he was caught into eternity!—he had waved his last farewell!

His son and Graham rose from his side, and looked at each other. It seemed to Graham that he was in a dream. John spoke. "It is long," he said, "since I remember M'Vicar asking me if I knew if my father had heart-disease, for he had seen him nearly faint one day. I said he had no disease of any kind that I knew of; but he has had it. Well, it's the death I would choose for myself if I had my choice."

Graham still gazed vacantly at the doctor, who went on—



"There's the girl he married! She'll be in a terrible way. Who's to tell her? You had better—you are her oldest acquaintance; and I'll go round by the back, and get men to carry him in."

John's matter-of-fact presence of mind in such awful circumstances brought back Graham's scared attention.

"No," he said; "I can't do it—I can't tell her. I could not bear to see her grief;" and even at that moment the thought flashed on him—"She would never forget me as the messenger of evil tidings."

"Then who's to do it?—it will have to be done."

"It will have to be done," Graham echoed.

"Perhaps Mary might do it. Yes, Mary will do it. That will be better. Will you go back and send her here?"

Graham went away in a tumult of thought and feeling. He had once believed that he could smooth Bessie's path when it was very rough; but he was powerless in this strait. How thankful he was that he had no bitter words, or even thoughts, of Mr. Grant to look back on! He was his oldest and best



friend ; and although he had shrunk away from him since his marriage, he had never ceased to honour him. And he recalled with gladness the circumstance that not twenty hours since he had heartily returned the warm pressure of his hand.

Mary saw him pass the window, and hurried to meet him. "What has happened ? Something has happened, I see. Has John"——

"No, John is all right ; but something has happened."

"Not papa ?"

"No. Mr. Grant"——

"Has not been thrown from his horse ? Meg has not been so ungrateful ? I hope it is not very serious ?"

Then Graham gradually told her. She stood transfixed.

"Dead, did you say ? You found him on the grass dead ? I'll go to her. But how can I tell her ?—how can I ?"

How could she, indeed ? And she had to wait for a time till she herself recovered from the shock of such sudden and appalling news.

John Grant went round to the back of the house to get some of the servants ; but hearing that Mrs. Grant was out, he went boldly in and alarmed the household. In passing out again at the front he encountered Mrs. Ainslie's brougham at the door, with that lady inside it. She hailed her nephew. " Bless me, John ! " she cried, " you look put out—more put out than I ever saw you. You and my brother have not quarrelled ? "

" No, I have not quarrelled with him yet, and I'm not going to begin now. "

" Are Mr. and Mrs. Grant at home then ? "

" Mrs. Grant has gone out ; my father is "——

" Gracious, John, what in the world is it ? Dead ! " she exclaimed ; " dropped down dead of heart disease. Did you know he had that, or did he ? "

" I didn't, nor did he, I think. "

" Goodness ! which of us is safe ? and Bessie is out—poor thing, poor thing ! But it is as well. Where has she gone ?—you don't know. How is she to be told ? Should not her aunt be sent for ? "

" I have sent for Mary. "

" Mary is all very well ; but I'll just drive to

Blindpits and let Miss Barclay know. I need not say, John, how much I sympathise with you."

"And Mr. Grant is really gone," she said to herself as she drove away; "how strange and sudden! I wonder if he has left a will, and how his widow is provided for?"

Before her husband had gone out, Bessie had said to him that she was going to Blindpits, where she expected to find Graham.

"You know," she said, "aunt and he were great friends; and I'll bring them both back to dinner; and we'll have such a glorious evening talking over old times—very old times, before we knew you, when I borrowed Graham's books through Mr. Dods, and when we read Mr. Dods's poems together. They were my most exciting interest in those days. Now life is all interest and poetry."

"Is it? Do you make me out to be poetical?"

"Yes, you are my poem—mine—to which I try to set myself, like perfect music, into noble words."

"Bess," he said fondly, "thou art a self-deceiving little witch; there's not a particle of poetry in my nature."

"You're no judge. You don't know poetry when you see it. I do."

"You'll need a microscope to see it in me; the only poetical thing I ever did was marrying you."

"I would like to argue the point, like Jack Easy; but we'll do so another time. Be off now, and don't keep us waiting dinner."

"I know of nothing to make me do that to-day. I'll be punctual as the sun."

The nurse was coming in with his little daughter. He stopped and kissed the child, then turned round, as has been said, and waved his hand to them standing in the window, and not many minutes after he lay in death. Surely

"The best of life came round its close,
To light him to the door."

The dinner was cooking, the postman was leaving his letters, his watch ticked on, his newspaper lay unopened, his clerk's pen scratched on in his office the documents he was never to see, his baby was sleeping, his wife's blithe laugh was ringing in the garden at Blindpits, and he—where was he?



Mrs. Ainslie drove on. She had been a widow. When a young thing like Bessie she had lost her husband at a stroke, and who better qualified to enter into her feelings? She half expected to find her at Blindpits, and somewhat excited she drove on. That Mrs. Ainslie was not heartless has been remarked before, but there are people to whom excitement of any kind always does good, like a brisk breeze in a heavy atmosphere; it is not meant, of course, that Mrs. Ainslie was consciously the better for it at this time. It was her nature, which the shifting life she had led so long had not tended to thwart—it was her nature to look at most things from a business point of view. Knowing that Mr. Ainslie's will was not made, she resolved it should be made, and that without delay. She was not ignorant of what portion in Scotland falls to a childless widow, and after such a lesson on the uncertainty of life as she had just had, any loss of time would be worse than folly. She had always known that Mr. Grant was not a rich man, but she was aware his life was pretty highly insured, and although he might have saved nothing, that with Miss Boston's money would



make his widow very well off. "And she will marry again; the child may be a little in the way, but if a suitable thing offers, she will marry again." In such channels did her thoughts run. Suddenly her coachman pulled up, and Bessie Grant's bright face appeared at the carriage-window; behind her stood Miss Barclay.

"Are you going to Blindpits? I have aunt here, but grandmamma and Miss Dobbie are at home; do drive on and see them."

"But, my dear, it's you I wish to see. Come in, will you, and let me drive you and Miss Barclay back."

Bessie turned to her aunt, "What do you say?" then to Mrs. Ainslie, "We had counted on a walk, and will be sorry to miss it; it seems a sin to drive on a day like this."

"Come, Miss Barclay, you'll not object to a drive; do come in," and holding out her hand to Bessie she drew her in and set her on the seat beside her, still keeping hold of her hand. "Yes," she said, "it is a fine day for walking. Ah! I remember when Lieutenant Gascoigne died, how the sun shone.

I think you know he died suddenly ; and the people at the station wondered who would tell me, they were all afraid ; then they got a good old parson to do it, and he always told me to think of it as a translation—positively as a translation—such as Methuselah's or Elijah's, you know"—

Bessie, who was familiar with the particulars, felt herself wicked in that she could hardly avoid a smile, and wondered whither Mrs. Ainslie was tending.

Barbara, who still sprang to a matter-of-fact mistake as a pointer to game, said, " Enoch—it was Enoch who was translated."

" Yes, yes, Enoch. It does not signify ; but was it not a beautiful idea ? ' Your husband,' he said, ' has escaped the decay of old age, and the pain and humiliation of a long illness.' But ah ! his death left me nearly destitute in a strange land ; while you, Mrs. Grant, are in the midst of kindred, with competent means."

This was Mrs. Ainslie's way of preparing Bessie's mind for the news awaiting her.

" I know I am very well off," said Bessie, wonder-

ingly. "Your case at that time, and mine now, will hardly compare, Mrs. Ainslie."

"Miss Barclay, you must help me. She must know; the news have gone abroad already like wild-fire"——

"What news?" said Bessie, innocently, and not alarmed, for she knew that Mrs. Ainslie always made the most of everything. "What news?"

Mrs. Ainslie stooped across, and whispered something to Barbara.

A low cry escaped her. "Oh, not that," she said; "surely not that!"

"Not the shadow of a doubt of it."

"Let us go back to Blindpits, Bessie. Oh, let us go back to Blindpits," entreated Barbara.

"No; my husband expects us to dinner, and we are not too soon. Why, what is it? You needn't speak in whispers; it can be nothing affecting me much, for I know that Mr. Grant and baby are perfectly well;" but a shade of uneasiness crept over her face, and her breath came quickly.

Mrs. Ainslie pressed her hand, and said solemnly, "No, my dear, your husband doesn't expect you to

dinner;" and then she distinctly related the circumstances.

Bessie looked, with a faint incredulous smile on her face, from her aunt to Mrs. Ainslie, and back to her aunt; then a deadly paleness came over her, and she fell back on the seat senseless. Was her spirit away, hovering on the mysterious border-land, in search of *his*?

CHAPTER LXI.

BUT Bessie lived, how she did not know; but she lived broken and bereft. Friends came round her; but words of sympathy were to her as idle tales. If they had comprehended her sorrow, surely they would have let her alone. But they did not comprehend it—nay, they doubted if it were very deep, for to her it was far too sacred to be exposed to the common eye, and she shut it in her heart. In her short life she had been once through the fire before, and she had learned self-control. Even her aunt was astonished, and concluded that she possessed a strength of mind she had not suspected. Not to her aunt had she betrayed her awful desolation; had she not once doubted him? But, looking out on the winter's sea, she accepted its sympathy. "There is sorrow on the sea, it cannot be quiet," she would say to her little daughter; "but I can be quiet though my heart is breaking"—and a

baptism of tears would fall on the child's face. Among people she could exert herself, but alone—and she would have been always alone if possible—life stood still—it was a mere vacancy. Many months went and came, and, except by the growth of her child, she hardly noticed them.

“Grant the factor” had been a power in the county for a long time; the Marquis owned the land, but the factor owned sway over the Marquis, and, except an occasional error in judgment, he had exercised his power well. There was regret from the castle to the cottage, the more, as who would have thought it—a man in his prime, full of health and strength; but men don't speak much of death except as a piece of news—the very oldest and most certain of all—a bit of news!

But the man being dead, people wonder next who is to fill his shoes. Even John Grant broached the subject at his own table that very evening—

“My father has had a good time of it with the Marquis. I wish I had been brought up to succeed him; even as it is, I would throw physic to the dogs if I thought I had a chance, but his lordship will

choose one bred to the business. Graham, you should put in."

"Not to-night; surely you would not have me do it to-night?"

"Well, I wager there are people getting up their testimonials and applications by this time."

"Not his nearest connections, however."

"I can't see what that has to do with a purely business matter. The great thing in these days is to strike while the iron is hot."

"O John!" cried Mary, "if you had seen that young creature at Grantsburn, stupified with sorrow, as I saw her."

"I can suppose it; I can believe that she is sorry about my father's death, or she ought to be, for he was infatuated about her; but my loss is more irreparable than hers—I can never have another father; I shouldn't wonder to see her have another husband before the year is out."

"John," cried Graham, "if you don't respect your father's memory, I know Bessie Grant well enough to be sure she will."

"I mean no disrespect to my father's memory."

“Your aunt, John, came while I was there,” said Mary, “not knowing anything about it. Poor woman ! what a shock—what a shock it was to her ! The sight of her sorrow roused even Bessie—you know Miss Grant was never very friendly to her. She rose, and kneeling beside her, said, with a piteous sob, ‘O Miss Grant ! your brother never loved you less because he married me.’ Miss Grant was much moved. Miss Barclay is there too.”

Miss Grant had come back to visit her old home, prepared to look with jealous eyes on the mother and child—and lo ! they were all that was left to her of the brother who had been the object of her life.

Graham lingered at Heatherburgh. It was true he had no business there, but then neither had he business anywhere else.

The factorship was still vacant, but contrary to Dr. Grant’s advice he made no effort to secure it. Probably he had his own reasons. Be that as it may, he got a note from the Marquis’s law-agent asking him to call on a certain day at his chambers in East-bergh; and when he went he found his lordship there, who conversed with him affably, telling him what a

faithful, excellent servant he had always found his late factor, and many other things, till he came to the object of this meeting, which was, in consequence of the terms he had heard Mr. Grant speak in of Graham, and in compliment to his memory, to offer Graham the situation.

"I should like," said the Marquis, "that Mrs. Grant retain the house while she wishes it, but she might not object meantime to having her late husband's nephew as an inmate; in fact, I think some such arrangement would suit remarkably well."

"Mr. Grant was not my uncle, nor any relation of mine; his sister married my father, that's all," said Graham.

"Oh!" said the Marquis, "that's how it was; well, it makes no difference—then it's settled, I suppose?"

"So far as I am concerned it is. It was suggested to me to apply for it, and I considered the matter fully, and came to the conclusion that I would not, having it in my power has not changed my mind." Then he respectfully declined the offer, to the astonishment of the Marquis. Of course he was neither pressed to take the place nor to give his reasons for



not taking it. It was a piece of preferment for which there would be many candidates; but the nobleman did not feel more graciously disposed towards the youth who had practically made light of what he considered his thoughtful patronage.

Fiercely as Graham had resented, as little short of sacrilege, John Grant saying that his father's widow would probably marry before the year was out, the remark clung to him. Would she marry? and if she did, was it possible she would marry him? It was the bare possibility of this that made him reject the Marquis's offer. She should not marry him as Mr. Grant's successor in office. He would bear her away to new scenes; that brief year and a half should be like a dream to her—a dream—or as if it had never been.

CHAPTER LXII.

HE had not seen Bessie yet. He was hearing often enough of her, for he went frequently to Blindpits, and had fallen into his old post at backgammon with Mrs. Barclay, and somehow he liked it. It brought up bygone times very vividly; he could imagine Bessie watching the game; would such a time come again? Do as he might, he could not banish the thought; he felt as if he were as bad as John Grant. After the long winter the spring of hope was stirring in the roots of his love for Bessie; guilty though he felt, he could no more help it than he could help living. If he had been conscious of no other feeling than friendly sympathy, he would have gone to Grantsburn at once, and he meant to go before he left. He was waiting now for Miss Grant; he had arranged to be with her in Eastburgh during the winter, having made up his mind to attend various

classes there. He was walking by the shore-road where he had been wont to exercise Meg, and where he met Bessie when she first visited Miss Boston. He saw a lady's figure wrapped in a black cloak coming towards him, and never passed a thought as to who it might be, when, as she came near, she suddenly threw up her veil, held out her hand and said—

“Graham, how do you do? why have you not come to see me all this time?”

It was Bessie's pure, well-like eyes that looked up to him, but the mirth was gone from her face, even the mobility was gone; there were brown hollows below the eyes, and the sweetness of her expression showed like sunshine on snow. The suddenness of her appearance nearly cost him his self-possession. Except the glimpse at Rotterdam, he had not seen her since that night when he rushed from her into the streets of Ironburgh.

“I've been often thinking of you, Mrs. Grant, but supposed you might not care for visitors.”

“Visitors! no; but I don't count you an ordinary visitor.”

There was a pause. She was thinking of her present grief; he was trying to suppress feeling altogether.

"I'm glad to see you out," he said at last.

"I came out to look at a rock down there. It is three years—three short years to-day—since I sat there, and let the tide creep round me. I would have perished if Mr. Grant had not saved me."

She spoke in a kind of far away voice, and looked towards the sea with tearless eyes, then turned round and saw Graham gazing on her pityingly; her stoniness vanished.

"O Graham!" she said, "I may speak to you. Miss Grant is naturally occupied with her own loss, and aunt never did him full justice; besides, she says I have many mitigations of my trial—I should think of my mercies as well as of my miseries; but what can I think of but him who is gone for ever, and I'll never see him more?"

And she burst into a very passion of tears. Graham stood by and said nothing. What could he say? She said—

"You'll think me silly and unworthy to have

been his wife, but I've never given way like this before, except when alone. O Graham, you know what I have lost !”

“ I can share your grief, Bessie. If I could only do or say anything to comfort you ; but I can't—time only can do that.”

“ You think I'll forget;—impossible.”

“ I didn't say forget.”

“ Ah, if I had the courage and energy to forget myself, and devote myself to others, as my good aunt does ! but I am selfish. Even now I am making you unhappy,” she said, seeing the deep pity in his face. “ But don't grieve for me,” she said, pleadingly ; “ I'll try and be submissive ; and, as aunt says, I've much left you know. She doesn't know that my all has been taken ; yet she too has suffered much and keenly. If I could only rise to her point of view !”

Graham was thinking that grief, and healing also, came to each in different guise. Bessie Grant's nature and Miss Barclay's were so opposed, that if they ever came to the same summit, it must be by wholly separate routes.

"Can you come home with me? if you can, I'll let you see my child. I have been neglecting even her in my selfishness. Not that, perhaps, you will care to see her; she is too young yet to interest people."

"I should like to see her."

As they walked, a tinge of colour came into Bessie's face from the air and exercise. At Grantsburn they found Dr. Grant sitting with the two ladies. Bessie shook hands with him, then turned to Graham, and said—

"Come with me to the nursery."

As he left the room he caught a smile on John's face which made his nerves tingle. He thought—
"Bessie did not see that, but if she had, not a fibre in her nature could have helped her to interpret it."

In the nursery a girl was sitting sewing beside as pretty a nest as was ever devised for a baby.

"Is she sleeping, Mary?" Mrs. Grant asked.

"Yes, ma'am."

"This is Queeny," she said to Graham; "I'm sorry she is sleeping."

He looked into the cradle. She seemed the

embodiment of absolute baby rest. There was neither sound nor the appearance of breathing; the long dark eyelashes lay dreamily on the marble cheek; one perfect little hand was doubled up and pressed to its chin.

"How beautiful!" he said softly. "What did you say her name was?"

"Bessie is her name, and she claimed so much attention I called her Queen Bess; her father took it up and called her Queeny; it distinguished her from me."

She was calm again, almost stolidly so.

"You are to be in Eastburgh all winter, I hear; come again and see me, and just now will you excuse me downstairs? I can't go down. Good-bye," and she held out her hand.

"Good-bye," he said, "and kiss Queeny for me when she's done sleeping."

"Now, Mary, you may go; I'll stay with baby."

Mary readily availed herself of the liberty. And then Bessie sank on her knees by the cradle.

"O God!" she said, "help me to live, help me to be thankful to live; pardon my selfishness, my

agony"—— The rest of her prayer was inarticulate grief.

Miss Grant for the time being had taken her old post as mistress of the house, and Graham gave her Bessie's message when he returned to the dining-room.

Dr. Grant said : " Not coming down ? she is not ill, I hope. I thought her walk seemed to have had the best effect."

" Poor thing ! it's the first time she's been out. I was glad to see her go even alone," said Miss Grant.

" Ah, but she did not come home alone, you see : a little palatable company would work like a charm."

" Do you think so ? I have tried to get her to come to Eastburgh with me for a while ; but she won't leave this house. She seems intent on feeding her grief. The loss has been a terrible one to both of us."

Here Miss Grant's voice shook, and she stopped. Barbara had slipped from the room when she had heard Bessie's message. Going upstairs, she knocked at the nursery door.



"May I come in?"

"Yes."

"Bessie, my darling! you are too much alone. Will you not make an effort and come down? the change will be beneficial."

"Please, aunt, let me stay. I can be as miserable here as I like, and that's my only comfort."

"No, Bessie; comfort will only come when you do your duty, and your first duty is submission to the will of God; it was his will to take your husband."

"I know it, aunt, I know it," she cried, "but oh, give me time, and I may come to that, but not yet, not yet."

"I daresay you think me unreasonable; perhaps I am."

"No, aunt, no; you don't advise me to do what you haven't done yourself; but I am a poor creature compared with you, or with people I have read of. Poor indeed!"

"I don't think so; your grief is natural and proper; my trials have been different, or I have always been compelled to active effort through them

all ; that, I believe, made them easier for me, and that is the reason I wish you not to shut yourself up alone and brood ; my darling, you'll injure your health."

As the doctor and Graham walked back to Heatherburgh, John said, "Graham, do you know the terms of my father's will?"

"I didn't even know that he left a will."

"He did, though ; and not only that, but all his business matters, books, papers, and everything, in as exact order as if he never expected to see them again. Whether they were always kept in that order, or whether he had any warning of the possibility of death coming on him suddenly, I don't know, but so it was." John paused a little, and then went on—"I have felt my father's death pretty acutely, I can tell you, although you mayn't think it."

"I never thought otherwise ; I don't see how you could help feeling it."

"Well, he and I differed on many subjects ; it was hardly to be expected that I was to pin my opinions to his, simply because he happened to be my father ; and then his marriage"—



"He had a perfect right to marry," said Graham, warmly.

"I am not going to say anything more about it now; but I fully expected, from his infatuation, that he would have cut me off with a shilling. I was, consequently, agreeably disappointed; he has left to me exactly the half of what he got from Miss Boston, the other half to his daughter; everything else to his widow. I can tell you, she's not exactly penniless; even were she older and uglier than she is, she has quite enough to attract fools; so I prophesy she won't retire to a convent."

"John, has the grief of that girl no power to touch you?"

"Well, you know, I'm a good deal among grief, and it's difficult to get up enthusiasm about one's stepmother."

Graham's nature recoiled. "I suppose it is human nature to harden with custom; but at times do you not feel a sweep of tenderness play upon your heart-strings, enough to take in the human race?"

"When are you going to publish?"

"What do you mean?"

“ Oh, a volume of quiet, tender, thoughtful essays, such as are so popular in these days; or poems indicative of fine fancy and feeling. Stick to the essays, they'll sell best. Tenderness!—what tenderness do you expect a man to dig about and dung that's rung up at all hours, and must serve—I can't tell how many—summonses before he gets his accounts paid? Why, Miss Stark, who is always, as Mrs. Ainslie says, pottering at benevolence, told me a moving story of a woman who was ill, and asked me to go to see her. I went, not once but frequently, till I set her on her legs again; and as, of course, she was perfectly destitute, I sent in my account to Miss Stark. A hawk in a dovecot could not have excited more commotion; she never for a moment expected a doctor's account. I said, ‘I did not know what she expected, but I always expected to be paid by the person who employed me.’ ”

“ And she paid you? ”

“ She couldn't help it. ”

“ But they are good little women, after their kind, the Misses Stark. ”

"I wager they'll think twice before they try such another benevolent action."

"You are right, but you might have dealt more gently; when Miss Stark took time to think, I am sure she would be quite ready to pay you."

"Any way, I suspect they found it a 'dear sweep of tenderness,' to use a phrase from the thoughtful and delightful bit of writing."

"I am sure Mary was vexed, if she knew about it."

"But she did not know, unless these little chattering women told her; the fact is, the more you can keep women in the dark about most things the better."

Graham pitied Mary, and it is possible that Mary sometimes felt herself an object of pity, but as possibly not, for unquestionably she loved her husband, and love makes such large allowances, and sees things in such a different light, that what to an outside person may appear an unhappy marriage, may not be by any means so unhappy after all, and *vice versa*. Besides, John Grant perhaps didn't paint himself any better than he was, and he liked to tease Graham.

But Graham did not regret that his stay with the doctor had come to a close ; and that he had promised to transfer himself to Blindpits, and become the guest of Miss Barclay, during the last few days of his stay in the district.

CHAPTER LXIII.

AND now Barbara was in comfortable circumstances. The laborious life was over, the foul blot was cleared from her name, and she had a good share of wealth, and what is called "position." Undoubtedly there are people whom these things will satisfy—the things, apart from the use that is made of them. They had not satisfied Miss Boston. Theoretically she despised them. However, she would have been an unhappier woman than she was if she had not had them; but then Miss Boston had been a woman of an ill-balanced mind, or at least temper. She had been in the habit of stripping life to the core, and of asking *cui bono*? Barbara Barclay was not subject to moods and tenses; she had a well-balanced mind, and duty was the backbone of her actions. How then did comfortable circumstances affect her? Graham had pictured her very contented, now that she had made the fair haven;



managing her little principality and her benevolent enterprises with the same even kindliness and conscientious attention she had exercised while working for daily bread, and finding her happiness in doing so. Now that he was under her roof, and had time and opportunity, or rather used them—for hitherto he had been pre-occupied by the events recorded—he observed a change in Miss Barclay. There was about her a species of unrest wholly foreign to her—to his idea of her. She started at slight noises, trifles annoyed her, and often she would lie down on a sofa in a kind of listless state.

Possibly the ordeal she had passed through with apparent impunity was telling on her now; the dark bushy flower, tied to its stick, was evidently drooping. Sturdy independence in women Graham did not care for; but weakness—meaning by weakness the pretty necessity for a lean—always touched him, as it does most men. His interest in Barbara, which had melted a good deal under the influence of distance and her highly correct letters, began to gather again. One day, as he sat reading, and Barbara was resting on the sofa, he heard her yawn wearily. He shut his book,

and looking across, said—"Mrs. Dods used to say—

' Gauntin' is wantin'
Ane o' things three,
Sleep, meat, or makin' o'.
Which o' them want ye? "

"It must be the last," said Barbara, "for of the two others I have certainly enough and to spare."

"Then we must begin, and put you through a course of it."

"I don't know what you would do; besides, it would sit awkwardly on me. I've never been accustomed to it."

No, she hadn't. Graham knew that.

"I would think you would be a good deal looked up to here," he said.

"That's a different thing from being loved."

"Miss Barclay, you don't suppose you are not loved!"

"I was not forming any supposition on the subject," she said, in a tone that forbade any farther probing; and Graham coloured, in spite of himself, remembering the foolish scene after the fever.



"Don't you take kindly to being landed proprietor?"

"Sometimes I do."

"You don't know how Mary Grant envies you your means and your unshackled freedom in doing good."

"Does she? It is an uphill business doing good; and the more means and appliances you have, it really seems the harder. The little I was able to do in Ironburgh appeared to have better and truer results than anything I have done since I came here."

"Perhaps it does not do so well to make a business of it. Business implies mind and machinery, and can go on without heart."

"Very probably you are right. I've been in error somehow;" and Barbara sighed. In Berwick Street sighing and yawning were nearly unknown to her.

"I did not mean that," said Graham. "I was only speaking in general. Couldn't you get Bessie to come and stay here, and take an interest in any of your plans? It would do you both good."

"Poor Bessie!" she said, and the tears rose in her eyes; "if I could have saved her from suffering, at

whatever expense to myself, how happy it would have made me. I worked hard for years to make her way smooth ; and see what has been the end—disappointment and grief. Mr. Grant kept her up through all my distress ; but I, who for years had no thought but her welfare, have no power to comfort her now.”

“I’m sure you are mistaken, Miss Barclay. I don’t doubt Bessie feels the very atmosphere round you soothing. You couldn’t expect that she shouldn’t feel Mr. Grant’s death deeply.”

“I didn’t expect it. It hasn’t been my habit to cherish unreasonable expectations.”

“Nor was it your habit to look at the dark side. I believe you are bilious,” he said, smiling in her face. “You should ask advice from M’Vicar.”

Barbara rose and went away, and in her own room burst into tears. She was certainly shaken, now that the strain was over. She had got into wonderfully comfortable circumstances, and like the shirt of Nessus they looked passing fair, but there was poison in the texture. Perhaps if she had stepped into them without such a horrible convulsion on the threshold, it might have been different, and she might

have stood up against prosperity as well as she had done against adversity. But it turned out, after all, that her nerves were not quite made of iron, and the necessity for exertion being over, her energy flagged. Now that she wanted the tonic of regular and necessary work, both her mental and spiritual system got out of order. There are some people who can stand a great deal of ease; she was not one of them; the comforts round her began to lose their taste; she felt as if she were of no use in the world. She believed that her mother even preferred Miss Dobbie's company to hers, and there was some truth in this. Mrs. Barclay had always rather stood in awe of what she thought the austere unbending nature of Barbara's virtue, and Miss Dobbie was a simple obliging creature who did what she was bidden as long as it was nothing wrong. Then some of her efforts at doing good had miscarried, and that had affected her in a way which at one time would have been impossible, which would only have made her try again the more unflinchingly. And Bessie had gone away, carrying with her, or tossing back as valueless, her very heartstrings; and now her dead husband was



infinitely more to her than she was, who had loved and cherished her from a child, and Graham laughed at her, and advised her to consult the doctor.

The worst of it was that Barbara knew she was weak and unreasonable, that she was morbid. As she sat alone she asked why her life could not flow on as it used to do? why, although she had lost what had hitherto been its object, the doing of good should not be a higher and more satisfactory end?

Having advanced so far, has Barbara's character been made clear enough to make it unnecessary to say that she was not a poor creature in all this? While she had worked for her household she had had an honest legitimate pride and enjoyment in it, although often dashed with anxiety, and she had done what good her time and means allowed in a humble kindly spirit, but it has never been hinted that she had a world-wide philanthropy. Her strange experience after Miss Boston's death had widened her sympathies somewhat; the reaction of public opinion after her innocence was so fully proved, somewhat more; but hers was a concentrated nature. She was consoled for Mr. Grant's death, by the thought which

at once and naturally occurred to her, that Bessie would come back, and they would be as they had been before; but Bessie declined this. She must stay in the home where at least the ghost of her brief unclouded happiness was. Being thus bitterly disappointed, and in very easy circumstances, Barbara's heart failed her for the first time in her life. No one loved her except in a sort of third-rate degree, which made them gracious in accepting kind offices for which she was to expect no return; and she had nothing in the world to hinder her dwelling on this idea but her own good sense, which also treacherously failed her. But it was true, she had always ministered, and now in her hour of weakness there was never a creature to say, Be of good cheer! Which of her intimate friends imagined that the independent prompt Barbara, after having ridden out the storm, and having been moored in the bay of peace and plenty, found herself lonely, miserable, and morbid? Not one. Graham supposed her bilious; but next morning she seemed well and he thought no more of it: Barbara could keep her weakness under lock and key. After dinner she was on the



sofa again, taking the rest which, now that she did no manner of exhausting work, had become almost necessary to her, and Graham was staring into the fire, thinking of the solitary inhabitant of Grantsburn—Grantsburn, the place every nook of which had been familiar to him since boyhood. How strange to think that now the old-fashioned child, who but a few years since had amused him in Berwick Street, was sitting there, its widowed mistress! He would have visited her daily if he had dared, but he did not dare; he must wait till time smoothed his way, and he could wait any length of time, even as Jacob waited for Rachel. Would his waiting be all in vain? if it was, why then—but before he had quite made up his mind what should happen, Miss Dobbie came in and said in a slightly mysterious way—

“There is Mr. Goldie coming in at the gate.”

“Is there anything very remarkable in that?” asked Barbara, with what seemed to Graham a tinge of sharpness in her tone.

“Nothing!—oh, nothing!” said Miss Dobbie,

apologetically; "but I thought you might like to know."

"I have always quite sufficient patience to wait till visitors are announced in the regular way, Miss Dobbie."

"Who is Mr. Goldie?" asked Graham.

"He is the new tenant of my farm," said Barbara.

"He is a grocer in the High Street of Middleburgh," said Mrs. Barclay, who had appeared from her private sitting-room as Graham asked the question. "A grocer," she repeated; "but a very decent man," and she fixed her eyes on Barbara.

"He may," said Miss Dobbie, "at one period of his life have stood behind the counter, and even worn an apron, but I believe that latterly"—

But what Miss Dobbie believed was not revealed, as at that moment Mr. Goldie entered. Graham looked at him. He was not dull enough not to have perceived from the above little interlude that something extra of some kind attached to Mr. Goldie. Mr. Goldie was middle-sized; autumn had set mildly in among his hair and beard; his face

was what Mrs. Dods would have called a public face—that is, it was like a great many faces you see every day—only the expression saved it from being very common property, and made it his own. His speech and manners were rather stiff and precise, but he might be feeling not quite at ease, as Mrs. Barclay had become very dignified, and shook hands with him rather drily. Miss Dobbie leant also to the dignified side; and, what surprised Graham, Miss Barclay even, was not quite her ordinary self.

Graham threw himself into the breach. He had recognised the visitor at once. “You and I have not met before, Mr. Goldie; but I once studied your face for two days in a way to get it by heart.”

“Perhaps,” said Mr. Goldie, glancing slightly at Barbara, “it’s as well to forget these things.”

“If we could. But I would know any of these twelve men if I were to meet them on the furthest verge of the green earth. We were deeply indebted to you I know, and Miss Barclay knows.”

“I was glad to be of service to her.”

There was a pause; *that* time came up very vividly.

"You live in Middleburgh?" said Graham.

"O yes!" said Mrs. Barclay. "We occasionally drive through Middleburgh, and I have observed the name over the shop door—'Alexr. Goldie, grocer.'"

"I've lived there for many years, in the house above the shop; in fact, I'm there still. But I have begun to build outside the town, and I expect to remove in a few months."

Then Graham, to make conversation, asked into the plans of the buildings, and got in detail the number of rooms, the ventilation, the water-supply, the baths, the three acres of ground on which it stood, etc.

"And when you have got the building done," said Graham, "the ladies of your family will come in for their share of work in the furnishing and laying out of the garden."

"I have no ladies in my family except my good old mother, and I'm concerned how she will bear transplanting. She encourages me, but it's for my

sake, not her own. However, if she doesn't like it, we'll go back to our old quarters. The new place will let easily at a pretty high figure." Mr. Goldie had a sharp eye for a bargain.

Barbara spoke very little—not more than her position as mistress of the house called for. Graham wondered Mr. Goldie did not get his business, whatever it was, done, and go; but he seemed in no hurry; and when he did go, it did not transpire that he had had any business at all.

Barbara proceeded to make tea. As she handed Graham his cup, she said—

"Now then, what do you think of Mr. Goldie?"

"How think?"

"What's your opinion of him?"

"I hardly have an opinion of any one I've seen only once. One thing, he is good-natured. If the ladies of a house had all been as dry to me as you were to him, I would have cut my visit short."

"Was I dry?" said Barbara.

"You wouldn't be aware of it?"

"No; I should be sorry if Mr. Goldie went away with that impression."

"It's the best impression he could have," said Mrs. Barclay; "but I am afraid he wouldn't see it. A man of that kind can't judge of these things as a gentleman can."

"Mr. Goldie is a gentleman, mother—if good sense and good feeling make a gentleman."

"And a fine house, with water 'laid on,' and a ventilating apparatus. The lower orders can make money do a good deal; but it can't give the habits of a gentleman."

"Nonsense!" said Graham; "they are much better without the habits of some gentlemen, at any rate."

"If he would brush his teeth," suggested Miss Dobbie, mildly.

"His class don't do that," replied Mrs. Barclay. "They let them grow as green as ditch-water. Don't speak of it, especially when we are at tea, Miss Dobbie."

"His teeth are good," said Graham; "so good that I concluded they were only his by right of purchase."

"You are wrong there; they are his own," said Miss Barclay.

"Barbara," retorted her mother, "how do you know that? Did he pick a bone with them the day he dined here?"

"That's the true way to enjoy a bone," said Graham. "I often give myself a treat of that kind. It is one of the few sweets of savage life that a poor creature in narrow lodgings can get at. I can neither have feathers, nor paint, nor war-dance, nor hunting-ground; but I can take my bone in my fingers, and make it as clean as a bit of ivory. And why shouldn't I?"

"O Mr. Graham!" said Miss Dobbie.

"O yes, Miss Dobbie, the society of cultivated ladies may make a man forego wild savage tricks of that kind, but nothing else."

"I suspect Mr. Goldie has not enjoyed much of the society of cultivated ladies," said Mrs. Barclay.

"Then the pleasure will be the greater when he does," said Graham.

"His mother is a very estimable old lady," Bar-

bara said. "He asked me to go upstairs and see her one day when I was in the shop."

"And did she dust a chair with the corner of her apron, and ask you kindly to sit down?" asked Mrs. Barclay.

"She has been a good mother to a good son," said Barbara with slight emphasis.

CHAPTER LXIV.

BEFORE Graham left, Mrs. Barclay seized an opportunity of having a private interview with him. The preamble was studied ; she began, " You know, Graham, that our friends, I mean our intimate gentlemen friends, are few indeed ; unless yourself, I don't know a single one. You know all our outs and ins : how we were buried in Ironburgh so long ; how Barbara was a comfort to us there. After we came here I thought my trials were to be over, and that I should end my days in peace. But no ; Bessie must throw herself away on a man old enough to be her father, and now she's killing herself with grief for his death ; but she is still very young, and no doubt will get over it. What is her trial to mine, when her grandpapa died, the companion of more than a score of years, and I was left helpless with a family ? My grief

was for life, but Bessie's will exhaust itself before long."

Graham listened with all his ears. He thought she was going to chalk out Bessie's future. What was she going to say to him about it?

"At least, poor thing! I hope so," she went on. "You know how we were left by Miss Boston, of course?"

Graham said he didn't, further than that part of her money was left to them.

"Very well then, Barbara Boston, for what reason she knew best, had a spite at me, and she left me nearly dependent on Barbara. That, of course, is anything but pleasant, but while Barbara remains as she is it is not of vital importance."

"I should think not, indeed. What is she going to do but remain as she is?"

"She might marry."

"She might, but she won't," said Graham decidedly. "I have heard such reports since I came here, but if I know Miss Barclay, and I know her pretty well, she won't marry any of the men I have

heard mentioned. She can see round a corner ; you may set your mind at rest."

"You think you know Barbara, but she is exactly at the time of life when women who have been more than usually sensible all along do the most foolish things."

"I don't know about that ; if Miss Barclay were to do a foolish thing I would never presume to pass an opinion on a human being again."

"And there are men, or at least a man, about whom there has been no report."

"Who is that ?"

"Didn't you hear her say she had been to see his mother ?"

"Mr. Goldie ?—nonsense. I thought she was barely civil to him last evening."

"Don't tell me ! I sicken when I think of it. I shall be turned out of this house to starve on a pittance !"

"Stop, Mrs. Barclay ; did your daughter toil so long and so manfully that you should doubt her now ?" he asked warmly, feeling her selfishness and

her injustice to Barbara. "Whatever she does, she'll not forget her duty to her mother."

"But she'll be swayed by him and by his mother, and people of that stamp have the narrowest ideas. To think of Barbara marrying a grocer!—a grocer!"

"I can't sympathise with you, Mrs. Barclay; I have no repugnance to a grocer, as a grocer. Why shouldn't a man do with his might whatever his hands find to do, in the grocery line or any other?"

"But you admit that some kinds of work are more honourable than others."

"It depends on the worker, not on the work."

"Then you will not help me?"

"To do what?"

"To make Barbara ashamed of her lover."

"Because he is a grocer? decidedly not, if he is her lover, which I don't believe."

"Barbara has money."

"And Miss Barclay is capable of knowing whether it is herself or her money that is wanted."

"You have lived a very short time in the world," said Mrs. Barclay with a deep sigh; "you have neither a mother's heart nor eyes."



Mrs. Barclay withdrew to persecute her unfailing devotee, Miss Dobbie, who had a poor time of it between her love for Miss Barclay and her sympathy for her mother.

Miss Barclay and Graham generally had the time between dinner and tea to themselves, and in the very quiet way which has been indicated enjoyed the gloaming in the interval. But next afternoon, Graham rose and made the gas blaze up, and, as it did so, looked down on Barbara's face, on which the light fell fully, and remarked in an off-hand way—

“When I was out this forenoon I had a walk with your tenant; does he drive over every day?”

“Every day?” said Barbara, somewhat startled; “I don't know, I suppose he does.”

“He's right to look well after his affairs. I found him rather an intelligent man.”

“Indeed! was there any insuperable obstacle to his being intelligent?”

Graham was amused. He was good, but you'll bear in mind that he had fallen with Adam in his first transgression; and he was quite wicked and curious enough to illuminate the room before he

opened up his subject; and impudent enough to feel amused when he began to think he had evidence that Mrs. Barclay's surmise was correct. It was not very wicked either, for, deep and mysterious as life is, it must have been intended that we should seize the bubbles on the surface and play with them, or man would not have been made a laughing animal.

"Oh, no obstacle that I know of, only every man you meet is not intelligent. Mr. Goldie has been on the Continent, and has come back with his pockets stuffed with information; he made me feel ashamed of myself."

Barbara was playing diligently with the tassel of the sofa-cushion; there was a gratified smile on her face, and she was delightfully unconscious of the process she was undergoing.

"And he was not nearly so stiff and peculiar to-day; indeed, he wasn't that at all."

"Stiff and peculiar! I was not aware of any stiffness and peculiarity about him."

"Ah, but you are not so good at seeing as I am; you are not aware that you hardly spoke to him yesterday. I really felt for the man; I don't dislike

him at all, and I wonder that you do ; I am sure there is nothing repulsive about him."

"Repulsive !" exclaimed Miss Barclay, and she dropped the tassel, "I daresay ! What are you thinking about ?"

"You think it too strong a word, perhaps, to apply to Mr. Goldie. I am glad of that, but I was afraid you might not. If I had been quite sure that you did not think him in any way repulsive, I would have brought him in to-day ; it would be as well for you to be on good terms with your tenant."

"You might have brought him in ; but it's of no consequence. If you meet him again, perhaps you'll remember that I don't consider him in any way repulsive"—with a little indignant tone.

"He asked me to go to his house ; do you think it would be worth while ?"

"You may judge of that for yourself," said Barbara drily. "I should think his society more profitable than that of John Grant, or Tom Ainslie, or others of that set you frequent."

"Their social position is a little different, you know." Barbara glanced up quickly, and Graham



thought he had overdone his part, and that she was suspecting him, and he went on—"I don't mind that, but you are, or used to be, a little of a conservative."

"Yes. I never undervalued social standing; but social standing without the goodness that should accompany it is a poor thing; the goodness without the social standing will always command respect, at least mine."

"Mr. Goldie is respectable; 'he keeps a gig.'"

This allusion, as a matter of course, was thrown away on Barbara; the cunning of the hand that winged that shaft always seemed foolishness to her: she could make nothing of it.

"I'll give him a visit. I'll come down upon him in the course of the winter with my agricultural chemistry, and let him see I know something at any rate."

"When you have finished your classes, what do you intend to do then?"

"Turn farmer."

"Really; how I wish you had got Mr. Grant's place."

"I was offered it."

"And did not take it?" she said, in surprise.

"No; there were many reasons. I haven't Mr. Grant's tact. I am apt to say what I think. I should probably have told the Marquis some day that he was a blockhead, or if a farmer had disregarded my advice I would have told him that he was an ass."

"You would have done no such things."

"Very well; I felt it did not suit me. I might try commerce, and make a fortune or lose one; I have no ambition to do either; in fact, I have no worldly ambition. I shall take a farm and vegetate. I don't mean to live quite for myself either, although I may not 'sit like the open-handed hours and shower down blessings.' There are people everywhere, and I may be of some benefit to my fellow-creatures. That's my plan; it has the merit of simplicity."

"You'll marry, will you not?"

"I don't know. Do you not think a single life best, Miss Barclay?"

"I'm not sure. I used to think so, at least in some cases; but the Creator knows best, and he has planted men in families."

“And what’s brought you over to the Creator’s way of thinking?” said Graham wickedly.

“I don’t consider that a reverent way of speaking. That’s the way Bessie and you used to get on in Berwick Street. I wonder if she will ever recover her boundless spirits again?”

“Surely,” said Graham, suddenly sobered. He had had his little bit of practice on Miss Barclay, and enjoyed it; but there his enjoyment stopped; there was not a creature to whom he could communicate it.

Once on a time, in Berwick Street, he had been accustomed to carry all his fine impalpable jokes to Bessie, and she comprehended everything like a flash of lightning; no need of clumsy explanations or breaking down into bits. Since then he had had no quick sympathy. Would it ever be his again?”

Miss Barclay spoke of his marrying. “Does she suppose,” thought he, “that I am going to look about for a wife as I would for a farm, and when I see a suitable one make an offer?” No doubt the bare notion of Bessie’s marrying again could not occur to her; and how she would be shocked if he were to hint his hopes, and naturally so, he instinc-



tively felt. He went back to Eastburgh, having seen nothing more of Bessie than the skirt of her gown disappearing at the church-door. But it was something to be once more under the same roof with her; nor did the knowledge of that blight his devoutness, rather it deepened the feeling.

CHAPTER LXV.

IN the couse of the winter Graham was in Ironburgh, and, although it lay far out of his way, he did not forget to call on his old friends in Berwick Street. When he rang the bell he expected to see one of the old familiar forms, either the lordly bulk of Mrs. Dods, surmounted by her fresh-coloured face, or the thin shrunken frame of the ex-baker, with his head tremulously drooping at the end of his long lean neck ; but a stranger—a stoutish, coarsish-looking woman—answered his summons, and surveyed him with good-natured curiosity. That there could be any change in the house had not occurred to him.

“Is Mr. or Mrs. Dods in ?” he said.

“Wha is’t that speerin’ for them ?” she asked, making no motion to admit him.

“Richardson,” he said, impatiently ; “my name is Richardson.”

"Come in, sir;" and she showed him into his old sitting-room. "You'll be the lodger I've heard them speak o'?" she went on. "Weel, sir, ye'll be vexed to hear that my auntie was buried yesterday."

"Buried!—Mrs. Dods you mean. Is it possible?"

"Ay, sir, it was unco sudden; and, as Mr. Pettigrew says, a warnin' to us a'"——

"Dead!" said Graham, not heeding her words. "And the old man—can I see him?"

"It was apoplexy," she continued, "and very sudden. She just fell down in the kitchen. My uncle, ye ken, is no much to count on when there's onything ado; but Mr. Pettigrew ran for the doctor, and somebody sent for me; and I have aye been here since, and I'm gaun to bide, no that it's very convenient, but what is the auld man to do his lane? But, as I was saying, Mr. Pettigrew brought the doctor; but what can doctors do when the time's come? However, it's but right to mak' use o' the means—it saves backcasts; but my auntie, poor woman! was ayont the power o' man"——

"Will you tell Mr. Dods I'm here?"

"I'll do that, sir. He's gotten a gey bit shake. He was aye a kind o' silly body. I little thought he wad outlive my auntie; but ane never kens. But what'll ye tak' ? Ye'll tak' something ?" and she went to the press in the room, and set a bottle, with glasses, and water, and biscuits, which had no doubt been part of the funeral meats, on the table. "He's gey silly, as I was sayin' "——

"*Can* I see him ?" said Graham once more. "I have not much time. Just tell him I'm here, will you ?"

"I'll do that, sir;" and she left the room, but came back behind Mr. Dods.

Graham rose to meet him, and they shook hands in silence.

The young woman kept lifting the things on the table, and setting them down again. "That'll do, Janet," said the old man at last; "that'll do, the gentleman and me 'ill manage;" and, however reluctantly, Janet took the hint, and disappeared.

"Oh, man," said Mr. Dods, "this has been a sair business—a sair business !"

"I'm sure of it," said Graham, feelingly; "but

there has been mercy in it too. She seems to have had no suffering."

"No, no; she never was conscious frae the minute she fell. I often thought she would some day be left a widow to fend for hersel', but it's better as it is. Better that the weaker vessel should be ta'en first."

Graham could hardly forbear a smile. "Yes," he said, "that's some consolation."

"Ay, but it's a wonderful change. How I miss her! Eh, how I miss her! I'll never wun ower't."

"Time does much, Mr. Dods," Graham said, soothingly; "and your niece seems a good-natured girl."

"Oh, ay; she's weel aneuch if she hadna sic a tongue. My wife could speak, but she spoke sense in the general; but that lassie and Pettigrew haver frae mornin' to night."

"Is Pettigrew to remain?" asked Graham.

"Weel, yes; ye ken *she* aye wad keep him, and I canna turn him out now—I canna do it!" and the old man's voice broke.

"Have you been doing anything in poetry of late?" asked Graham.

"No muckle, no muckle. I was thinking o' making something to *her* memory."

"You should do that. It would occupy your mind and soothe your sorrow; and she deserves it."

"You may say that, sir—you may say that. She was nae ordinar woman. Her balance o' mind was clean ayont the common. I mind that struck me when I fell in wi' her first; and when at last she kent she was to get me, she was in nowise uplifted."

"Was she not?" said Graham, gravely; "she had great good sense."

"But for a' that, she had her weak bits, that I couldna help seeing. There was nae getting her to comprehend some things. For instance, she had a habit, since ever I kent her, o' aye keeping the biggest penny-piece she fell in wi' through the week to put in the plate on Sabbath. Weel, I never could bring her to understand, or at least to act on the understanding, that a wee penny just gaed as far as a big ane. The very morning she de'ed she had her big penny laid on the drawers'-head a' ready;" and the old voice grew thick and tremulous again; "but thae bits o' things were just sae muckle part and parcel o'

hersel', that she couldna been hersel' without them, and even silly things lay their grip on ane's heart, and the grip tightens at a time like this."

If Graham had had less true respect and sympathy for the old man's grief, he would have said, "Embodiment that idea in your poem, Mr. Dods;" but he couldn't at that moment, although he was aware there would be nothing so true or natural in Mr. Dods's verses, or they would be different from any of them that he had seen.

CHAPTER LXVI.

WHEN Graham was home, and sitting by Miss Grant at her fireside, he recounted to her his day's adventures. He generally did; he was fond of feminine society, and every woman with whom he had lived in the same house liked him, and made a point of attending lovingly to his wants. He told her of Mrs. Dods's death, and said, "When you are writing to Mrs. Grant you'll tell her of it."

"Why, she's here," said Miss Grant; "I forgot to mention it. She came in the afternoon, and, as she seemed wearied, I advised her to go early to bed. You'll see her in the morning."

"Here!" said Graham; "has she been here all the evening?"

"Yes," said Miss Grant, surprised at the tone of his voice; "there is nothing remarkable in that."

my brother as I do who was so long with him. Young people soon get over things."

"So people say. I hope it may be so in her case."

"I wouldn't like my brother soon forgotten."

Graham was silent. He was thinking, "If I had known she was here I would have been home hours ago."

When he went into the sitting-room next morning Bessie's slight black figure was standing in the window. She wore a widow's cap; and he thought he had never seen anything so ridiculously out of place. She turned round and came to meet him, smiling. "I should have waited for you last night, Graham; but I was a good child, and went to bed as I was bidden."

"I hope you feel rested?" he said awkwardly. "I hardly knew you with that—thing on your head;" and then he coloured, feeling he had made an unfeeling blunder.

"My cap?—I didn't think of wearing it at all; but I put it on when I appear in public. Aunt said I must; that it is the custom, and marked the respect I had for——. O Graham, you know that dress and words are both idle to tell my loss. But," she went on, with a smile on her pale face that again reminded him of sunshine on snow, "though aunt doesn't sit on forms now, she still stands on ceremonies."

"Does she? I thought she had relaxed a little."

She glanced at him after her old fashion. "How came you to suspect?" she said.

"Perhaps a bird of the air carried the matter."

"Miss Grant, Graham has heard, it seems, of what I was telling you yesterday."

"Have you?" said Miss Grant. "How is it that you never mentioned it?"

"Mentioned what? I had nothing to mention; merely an airy nothing, that would have evaporated in speech."

"Grandmamma doesn't think it an airy nothing, nor do I now."

"I am glad to hear it—really glad to hear it."

"Are you? If I thought it would make aunt happier—— But I doubt that."

"Do you? Owing to the paternal interest I take in Miss Barclay, I visited Mr. Goldie, and made inquiries about him in a quiet way, and I think he may be trusted to make her happy."

"They are so different, and aunt always seemed so complete and independent; and now that she is in such comfortable circumstances—— I must say it was some time before I believed it."

"I didn't quite take it in at first either."

"Grandmamma is in a bad way about it. If he had only been a gentleman, she says; but a man who sends letters in big blue envelopes, addressed in a great round commercial hand; and has even, she says, sent dirty newspapers, tied up with a bit of twine; and Miss Dobbie says he calls everything 'first-rate.' Now aunt is punctilious, you know, and, though really humble, values herself on being a gentlewoman by descent and habit."

"There are spots in the sun," said Graham; "but he is first-rate at giving light and heat for all that."

"For my part," said Miss Grant, "I have long

given up being astonished at anything in the shape of a marriage."

"If it had been any one but aunt; but you understand she has never spoken to me of it, nor have I ever seen Mr. Goldie. Perhaps it's only a romance of grandmamma's after all."

"No; I am nearly sure it is a romance of Miss Barclay's. The magic ointment has got into her eyes, and she sees a man and a grocer as a god walking."

"Don't joke," said Bessie, warmly. "It is too serious a matter for that; and aunt's eyes are not of the kind that take on magic ointment. She sees Mr. Goldie just as he is, which is a comfort to me, for where there is no hallucination there can be no disappointment."

"Neither you nor she will be disappointed. Natty habits are but the little finishing touches of the guinea's stamp; 'the man's the gowd for a' that.'"

"I hope you are right; I do hope you are right. These little things would not weigh with me, but then aunt is so different, that I wondered; besides, she always spoke as if her plans were laid to the end of the chapter."

"So they might, but a new chapter begins. Do you know Mr. Goldie was one of the jurymen—you mind when; and but for him things might have gone very differently."

"I did not know; that may partly account for it; it is very curious."

"Yes, it is. You have not forgotten your old friend Mr. Dods?" and then Graham went on to tell his Berwick Street news, which were sad enough, but there are few events of life so tragic that a thread of the comic does not go zigzag through them; and Mr. Dods's characteristic and innocent self-conceit shone like phosphoric points on the dark ground of his grief. Bessie almost cried and laughed together, and they were so thoroughly back in old times, that Graham might have been tempted to forget the gulf between them, but for the muslin film that covered the head and shadowed the face, that to him was the one face in all the world. He was thankful that they had met and parted, and he had not betrayed his feelings.

And Bessie thought much of her aunt—her much-tried and beloved aunt, whom it seemed she was

about in one sense to lose; she could not feel happy about it, although she reasoned she was selfish in not doing so. And she thought, too, of the old couple in Berwick Street, who had been such prominent figures in her young life, and it took her out of herself and her all-absorbing grief. It is thus that time pushes back, and back, and back, a great sorrow, and begins to train the ivy of events over the ruins.

CHAPTER LXVII.

BARBARA was one day standing in the bow window she had planned and built, looking out on the beds of gay flowers she had planted and nursed, and which a night's hard frost had suddenly changed from beauty to rottenness. The weather was heavy and lowering, and a sullen sky looked down upon her; it was shortly after Bessie, in answer to her proposal that their lives should join again, had said, No; she meant to stay at Grantsburn. She stood idly gazing out, morbid and miserable, and ashamed of herself. Why, she said, could she not stand alone now, as she had done so many years? She believed she was not well, and yet she was not ill. She would begin some regular hard work—something that would satisfy her conscience that time was not slipping past her unimproved: a charity school, perhaps, to be taught by herself. But it was not that exactly; her nerves had been shaken,



and her health was beginning to suffer, and although she did not know it, she was unconsciously crying out for sympathy and support. If Mrs. Barclay had been a different kind of mother, she would have got them, or if Miss Dobbie had been of sharper mental faculties; as it was, the person, and the only person, who noticed any change, was Katie, who had been maid-of-all-work at Berwick Street, and was now housemaid at Blindpits. Her quiet sympathy and attention sometimes brought the tears to the eyes of her mistress. Barbara was decidedly weak at this crisis.

Mr. Goldie had called on business several times, and he called this day. He went up to the window and shook hands with her; then a sudden interest shot into his eyes, and he said, "Miss Barclay, you are not well; your eyes are heavy, and"—— Barbara looked up, and in that moment the ointment did its work. Mr. Goldie had begun life as a commercial traveller, but actually, at this crisis, he was at a loss what to say, and, accordingly, nothing was said. Then the small matter of business he had come about was settled, then some sentences of little meaning uttered, and he went on his way, having found out,



what he did not know when he entered, that he was in love with Miss Barclay. Her face had stuck in his memory since the bleak afternoon he had travelled in the same carriage with her, on her first journey to Blindpits, and circumstances had not tended to rub it out; but till that afternoon, when he held her hand in his, he had never thought of her as his wife.

Had he known Barbara as well as we do, he might have despaired of success, but he did not; and down he came like a great boulder on a pond of ice, and went crash through it, to find a warm temperature beneath—at least that is my glacial theory on the subject. Not that he came, saw, and conquered, either; but after that day Barbara lost the power of criticism. When a newspaper came in the manner that offended Mrs. Barclay, the click of Barbara's scissors seemed gentler as she severed the obnoxious string, and the big blue envelopes were finally lost on her; and, if it were possible, the phrase "first-rate" came to have a musical sound for her. You will think this hardly possible, and I allow it partakes of the nature of miracle. But there is no miracle-

worker like love. It will give an awkward woman tact, make an impudent man modest ; and for the humblest pair on earth it creates, once in a lifetime, a glory which is a shadow of the heavenly world.

I feel to the full the awkwardness of introducing Barbara's husband so near the end of my history ; but the truth is I never expected her to marry. Her marriage was as great a surprise to me as it was to any of her friends. Even in Berwick Street I have heard Mrs. Dods, when she was wondering in Miss Barclay's presence why such a woman was not married, catch herself up, and remark "that the very best women were aye left standing,"—by way, I fancy, of solatium to the wound she might suppose she had inflicted on Barbara's feelings, although, no doubt, Barbara was far from envying Mrs. Dods's matrimonial felicity. Mrs. Dods, poor woman ! did not live to rejoice in her friend's happiness ; she was gone from her little world of small cares and vexations, and Berwick Street would know her no more for ever.

I knew nothing of Mr. Goldie till he became tenant of Blindpits. He struck me as being the very

type of the good, frank, successful man, with no nonsense about him. He might not have the fine breeding of a gentleman, but he had the finer breeding that comes from a good heart, without which the other is but the japan that in the straits of life will rub off and expose the ugly metal below.

They were married in June, certainly not because of the extreme leafiness of that month, but because the villa was ready. As may be supposed, they did not go and look at lakes and catch cold, but went directly home, and Barbara's tastes were not sufficiently cultivated to make her recoil from a spick and span villa. They were not young; but knowing Barbara, as it is hoped you do, and having an idea of Mr. Goldie, as it is hoped you have, you will be aware that neither of them had the kind of temperament that sits down to cry over spilt milk. They set themselves to seize the passing moment and make the best of it, which is sound philosophy and true religion. Barbara went about doing good with a glad heart, which is of itself a cure for many evils, and her husband aided and abetted her in its every wish. With some surface differences, they were well

matched, and she smoothed his innocent excrescences insensibly. I have noticed him proud of her knowledge of geography, which is indeed accurate and extensive, considering the general adult mistiness on that head, as is her knowledge of historical dates and elementary facts in general. You have a notion that their existence would be what you call humdrum, have you?—no, not to them; and perhaps we had better wait till the crude unfinished business of life is over, and the sequel appears, before we determine what is humdrum.

Graham and Bessie saw Barbara drive away from Blindpits with deep feeling.

“I never dreamed aunt would marry,” said Bessie, sinking in a chair, and putting her handkerchief to her eyes.

“To think of her leaving us,” said Mrs. Barclay, “for a stout elderly grocer, and a very ordinary man—me in my old age!” Graham was the only one who saw clearly on the subject. He knew Barbara was an ordinary woman, except in her laborious, self-sacrificing life (a noble exception), and he did not see why she should carry that out to the end. He

believed in Mr. Goldie thoroughly; and although Miss Barclay had a large corner of his heart, another man having her did not require her expulsion from it. He felt remarkably comfortable even when he recalled his own proposal after the fever. Miss Dobbie silently shed tears. Much as she leaned on the wisdom of Miss Barclay, she was afraid, in the language of her late excellent friend Miss Davie, that she had thrown herself away. Mrs. Barclay stood the parting from her daughter wonderfully well. Barbara had made liberal provision for her mother. She was left at Blindpits monarch of all she surveyed, except the swallows. She rose to the occasion and enjoyed it. Her uncertain health became very certain; she seemed to have got a new lease of life. You have no doubt known very good and valuable people, in whose absence less perfect forms of humanity breathed more freely. This was the case with Mrs. Barclay. She had known Barbara's reign to be wise and good, but she had fretted under it.

Graham went away to his farm. He had only entered it the previous month. It was a sheep-walk on the Border; and having been made up of several

smaller farms thrown together, there was no house on it suited to the ideas of a modern tenant-farmer, but Graham took possession of three rooms and a kitchen with infinite contentment. According to the terms of his lease, he was to get a new house, the site for which he could choose, and the building would go on under his own eye. The cage would be ready by the time he had secured the singing-bird he meant to inhabit it. Before he left Blindpits, he had much given his mind to decide on the question, "Should he venture to ask Bessie to write to him?" A letter from her would be priceless anywhere; but away where his chief company was the ovine and bovine people on the hills, and his music the singing burns, what would it not be to him? Within himself he debated the matter anxiously. It was the consciousness that he regarded this as the first step towards the end he had in view, that made him hesitate. Dwelling on this aspect of it, it did not occur to him that she would think it a very natural and trivial thing.

It was the day after the wedding. He had parted with the ladies at Blindpits, and gone over early in

the forenoon to bid Mrs. Grant good-bye. He had done so on the previous night, but it could be done over again without harm. He found her walking among the trees in the garden. She turned and saw him behind her.

"You didn't expect to see me?" he said.

"No; but I was thinking of you—wondering whether you would be away yet, and I am very glad to see you."

"Are you?"

"Yes; do you not believe me?"

"I wasn't thinking what I was saying."

"I have felt happy this morning; this gorgeous weather, this beauty round us, makes me that I can't help feeling so. I remember Mr. Grant once said to me that it could never be a sin to be happy. I wonder if he would think it a kind of treason to him if he knew I could be happy in a way without him."

"No," said Graham; "he loved you, and he must wish you happy."

"Come and sit here," she said, leading the way to the seat in the clipped yew. "You would think the birds had gone crazy this morning; they are

making such a musical uproar. There in the opposite field, look! do you see a skylark just springing from the grass? You would think that flying or singing would be enough at a time for a creature of that size. Does it feel, do you think—can it feel such a pitch of ecstasy? I was seventeen years in this world before I heard the lark; and how many people in yon great smoky Ironburgh miss that birthright altogether!”

“Did Mrs. Goldie or Miss Dobbie pine for a lark when they lived in Ironburgh?” asked Graham gravely.

“I know you are laughing at me, as you used to do, and it does me good; it is a real luxury, but you don’t know the comfort I get from these birds and flowers. Oh, what a winter I have had—what a long winter of deep unmitigated gloom! Looking back on all that has happened these few years, it seemed as if we were only footballs for a malicious fate; but when summer burst on us suddenly, and I came out here, it was like a resurrection; I thought surely all will come right in the end, when even the sparrows are cared for. This morning I happened to look into a bird’s nest; it was empty. You remember Vaughan’s lines—‘The birds are singing some-

where—somewhere,'” she slowly repeated, and her eyes filled with tears.

Could Graham be jealous of her love for the dead? If he ever had loved her, he loved her more intensely now. If he had dared he would have poured his heart out at her feet; but he was awed and purified from selfishness at that moment. More than that, if she had given him any opening, if there had been anything in her manner less simple and natural than it was, although he would undoubtedly have caught at it, she would have suffered in his estimation in spite of himself, at least he felt a lover's exaltation in thinking that all she said was “wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best.” He could have sat in this fair scene and listened to the murmur of her sweet voice till doomsday.

“I'll bestir myself,” she went on. “Queeny of course will be my first object in life; but there are many things a person with leisure and a little money can do—many things—and I'll learn to forget myself and think of others. I've got renewed strength, and although we can't forget, we can bear our burden wisely. I'm talking on as if you cared to hear me;

but I have faith that you do care, and you used to understand so quickly, that is such a comfort. Aunt is wise and good, but she has never loved and lost; she couldn't imagine it—she couldn't imagine it, and I was selfish and unreasonable."

"I think I understand, Bessie," he said; "but if I can't exactly feel with you, it would take long to tell how much I have felt for you."

"I'm sure of it, Graham; I'm sure of it."

If ever the inexorable impertinence of railway trains is to be felt, it is at such a moment as this. Graham knew that if he missed the train at Heatherburgh that forenoon, he could not get a train at Eastburgh to take him home till next day, and he had made several business appointments, to be kept on his journey; but what of that? he let the hour pass, and after all he couldn't stay there very long.

Bessie discovered he was too late for the train he had spoken of going by.

"Are you vexed?" she said anxiously. "I suppose you did not think it polite to interrupt me. You were not on such ceremony on Berwick Street. What

will you do ? was it important that you should have gone at twelve ?”

“ Very important.”

“ How provoking ! but it’s your own blame.”

“ I’m lazy ; I would like to sit here all day.”

“ Then sit all day. I’ll go in and see what they are doing about dinner, and ”——

“ No, don’t go,” and he laid his hand on her arm ;
“ I must positively move off in a quarter of an hour.”

“ You prefer sitting here to going in doors ?”

“ Yes.”

“ Very well ; I’ll get lunch brought here.”

“ No, don’t—don’t speak of eating—I couldn’t eat. I’m not”——

“ Hungry ? but I am. I haven’t been holding forth for two hours without getting hungry. I suppose you have got over your boyish taste for biscuits and jam ?”

“ Oh, well, yes ; I could eat that, but nothing less ambrosial.” He watched her disappear into the house and come back with a plate of biscuits in one

hand and a pot of jam in the other, which she set on the seat between them.

"I wonder," she said, "if Eve invented jam?"

"I'm sure she did if Adam first invented sugar."

"That's not likely," she said. "He doesn't seem to have been what Americans call a smart man."

"It's a difficult thing to imagine one's-self in Adam's shoes."

"He wouldn't have any shoes, you know, but he could hardly have a simpler meal than this."

"Nor better; I wonder how you remembered I liked biscuits and jam."

"I have a good memory, but it wasn't a great feat to remember that. I used to be astonished at the quantity you ate."

"Really! then I had better stop now. Would you mind—I was thinking perhaps you wouldn't mind taking the trouble of writing to me sometimes. At my out-of-the-way place a letter is a treasure."

"Trouble!" she cried frankly; "it would be no trouble; it would be a pleasure; but what could I write that you would care to read? I shall be here

all alone. Would it interest you to hear that Queeny had cut another tooth, how far she could walk, what words she could say?"

"Yes, it would interest me very much; but you can tell me of the Heatherburgh people, your grand-mamma, and Mrs. Goldie."

"But Mrs. Goldie writes to you herself."

"She used to do so; she may not now."

"Ah, she'll do it. You are a great favourite; but if you were not, she would think it a duty and write duly."

"But her letters are—do you not think—her letters are a little dry?"

"If hers are dry, what will mine be? but I'll write, and risk your criticism. Do you mean to answer them?"

"You'll see."

Thus the vital question was set at rest; and was Graham pleased? He ought to have been; but—if she had only promised to write just a shade less as a matter of course——.

On the way to the station he met Dr. Grant.



"You are here yet?" he cried. "I thought you were to have vanished in the forenoon."

"So I was; but I changed my mind."

"Under what temptation?—a delightful *tête-a-tête* or a walk with Miss Dobbie?"

"I might have been worse employed."

"Calling at Grantsburn, for instance—visiting widows is a good employment."

"John, you are incorrigible."

"How is my step-sister?"

"I didn't see her. She was sleeping, I suppose."

"Are you not going to see Mary?"

"I saw her yesterday; she doesn't expect me."

"But you saw Mrs. Grant yesterday too. Mary will be jealous and offended. You are going back to your hut? Who would have thought of your turning out a romantic hermit?"

"Who indeed?" said Graham, laughing good-naturedly.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

GRAHAM went back to his hut, sat at the window of his little room, looking down the grassy valley that showed the glittering folds of the burn like jewels on the breast of a fair woman. The evening sun was touching all the tops of the hills with glory, as a dying artist gives the last strokes to his picture from an imagination kindled by nearness to the heavenly world. The flocks and herds looked in good health and condition; and matter-of-fact as that view of them is, they could not have been pleasant objects in the landscape if they had not, especially to the owner gazing at them. He had been tramping over his ground the whole day, and having come in wearied, had thrown himself down with a book, but he had read none. Three days ago he had been with Bessie at Blindpits; two days ago he had been with her at

Grantsburn, and he went over every look and word of hers during these times, not to gather encouragement from them—for as far as that went they were a blank—but to feed himself. When might he dare to speak of the wish that so possessed him? She would write. He must be guided by the tone of her letters. Surely she must throw some glance into the future. She could not mean to live alone for life. She could not have forgotten the past, as connected with him; and she had said it would be a pleasure to write to him. Like Rumpilstiltskin in the fairy story, he spun this straw into a strong golden hope—almost certainty. She would write—when would she write? In two weeks? or two months? or when? What a fool he was not to have asked when he might expect a letter! Then he thought he would write first, and that would bring a letter more speedily. He meditated as to what he would say, and watched two figures coming up the burn—the children of one of his servants who went to school every day to the nearest village. Very slowly they came on, stopping to play when the spirit moved them; like the spider, they lived along the line. At length they passed round the end of the house;



and shortly after his servant entered the room, and laid down several letters, saying—

“Tommy brought them; the afternoon post was in afore they left the village.”

Lazily he took them up. A sudden glow overspread his face; there was his name in Bessie’s writing—the bold careless writing her aunt had bewailed so often—a good hand if she could only take pains, and pay attention, and think what she was about. He opened it, his fingers almost trembling. Was it a delicious confirmation of his hopes—or would it dash them? He read—

“Dear Graham—It was so like you to ask me to write you, and draw me a little out of my sad thoughts, for I am sure a letter such as mine can be no object to you. But first, like a true-born Briton, let me unburden myself about the weather. Yesterday, earth, sea, and sky, were perfect; to-day all is changed: we have east wind, and a thick wall of wet mist—that makes man and beast, and even the trees, cower—surrounds us. It is too bad to write to you in an east wind. You’ll be on your way home. I hope

you'll not get cold. 11th.—I was interrupted yesterday. This is what Mrs. Dods called the lang 'leventh o' June, do you remember? Aunt and Mr. Goldie drove over this forenoon. They are certainly different. Whether they are the complements of each other I don't know; I hope so—they seem very happy. He does not make a secret of it; and even aunt, who you know is not thrown off her equilibrium by everything, was brighter than I have seen her since Miss Boston's death. Human happiness is to me a more touching sight than human misery, if possible. I almost fear to look on it, in case the spell should break. But one can't be sentimental in Mr. Goldie's presence. Aunt always repressed the puling tendency in me, not with much success, I fear, for I am ashamed to say, after they left I sat down and cried heartily; that was weak, and it is weaker still to tell of it. My beloved aunt! I hope she does not feel her husband's grammatical slips; only, if she were not on the watch to prevent herself, I am sure she would correct them from force of habit. You wanted hints from me about your new house. Mr. Goldie could give you valuable advice from his recent experience.

When they left me they went across to grandmamma's. Queeny is growing fretful, and wishes me to take her on my knee.—With best wishes, I am yours sincerely,

“BESSIE GRANT.”

Lover though he was, Graham felt at once that neither Bessie's thoughts nor her heart were in these lines, but only her good nature. She had wished to do a kind thing, and she had done it. His spirits fell—he seemed as far from his goal as ever. But the letter had come from her, had been touched by her, and he sat with it in his hand, watching the fading day, and, in the hush of the June twilight, listening to the quiet song the burn sang to the sleeping hills. Woods there were none except half-a-dozen old trees that stood at the head of the glen, and which he meant to press into the service of his new house, to as much advantage as possible. They, he, and the hills, paid the song the compliment of rapt, silent attention, and it soothed him as the murmur of a mother's voice soothes a restless child.

With more or less frequency letters went to and fro for many months. Sometimes they showed gleams



of Bessie's old spunk, and Graham thought, "Now she is going to throw aside the past, and will be herself again;" then there was a relapse, and so on. He did not go to Grantsburn; he knew he could not do that again without betraying himself. At the beginning of winter Bessie wrote that she had made up her mind to leave Grantsburn. "It has cost me much," she said, "to come to that resolution; but it is best. I might stay, for I am assured that the Marquis would never ask me to leave; but my husband's successor is about to be married; and the house, no doubt, is attached to the office, and is his right. Susan Ainslie is to be his wife, and she does not want to have a house in Heatherburgh, and said to me, 'she was surprised how I cared to live in a big house like this all alone.' She is not over-sensitive; but who can touch my wound so gently that I shall not wince? If one could only shut the lid on memory! So I shall go to Blindpits for the winter at least. I may be of some use there, and Queeny will amuse grandmamma."

Graham was pleased to hear of this arrangement, although he knew the two old ladies sufficiently to

be aware that between them Bessie would be worried often enough ; but it was better for her that she should be worried than that she should be let alone.

He speculated much on her letters that winter, and, as is usual with commentators, he saw a great deal in them that was not there. He fancied the tone of them weary ; and when she said in one, " I generally play backgammon with grandmamma at night ; but she finds me a poor antagonist, and wishes often she had you. I thought farmers had nothing to do in winter. Why don't you bestow some of your spare time on us ?"—he analysed that sentence, not grammatically you know. He sifted it, he tried what construction it would bear ; he even attempted to persuade himself that it was an innocent hint, the wish being father to the thought—to use again words that have been much tramped in the mire of quotation.

He made some sort of general excuse for not having been at Blindpits ; and then came another letter repeating the former invitation, with the addition, " Grandmamma thinks you put us off in a very lame way. I can only suppose you are growing lazy ; a



bucolic life has a dozey effect on the energies. Do you never leave home except to go to a market, and is your talk chiefly of bullocks? If so, I would advise you to seek the haunts of civilisation as soon as may be; there must surely be a singular fascination in a but and a ben."

And Graham believed, and went to Blindpits to look into the book of fate. He went without having given notice of his coming. Asking for Mrs. Grant, he was shown into the room where she was sitting by the fire reading the newspapers. She started up with a glow of pleasure on her face—

"Graham!" she exclaimed. "You have come at last! I must let grandmamma know; it is too good news to keep her ignorant of;" and she rang the bell and said to the servant, "Tell Mrs. Barclay that Mr. Richardson is here."

"There is no need to hurry Mrs. Barclay," said Graham, with a shade of annoyance.

"Oh, she won't hurry; but it will please her to hear you have come."

"I thought *you* wanted me, Bessie," he said.

"So I did. I like to see you. You didn't think

I wanted you for anything particular? I'm sure if you had you would have come sooner;" and a smile sweeter than the smile of her merriest maiden days shed its witchery right into Graham's heart.

"I was afraid to come any sooner," he said, venturing a step.

"Afraid!" she said; "what were you afraid of?"

"I was afraid of the reception I might get."

"Graham!" she said, in a tone of reproachful surprise.

"You know it then, Bessie?" he said eagerly.

"You know that your letters are all I have had to live on?"

"Meagre diet!" she interrupted.

"All I have had to live on; and you must have seen from mine—you surely must have seen from the strain of mine—that I was coming some day—some day—to ask you to—to be my wife?"

She was sitting at the table, with her hand resting on it, looking up at him; he was standing beside her; now she bent her head and murmured—

"I did not know it—I did not know it. O Graham! I cannot forget. If I could have dreamed that

you would misinterpret my readiness to write to you, my wish to have you for a friend, I would not—I wouldn't"—and her voice trembled, and she stopped.

"I have come too soon," he said.

"No!" she said firmly, and looking up at him; "I cannot forget, and I would not if I could."

"I only ask you to think of the living."

"It cannot be—not in that way. I shall never marry."

"Bessie, I went from you once before; you, who have loved and lost, must know what I suffered then. Must I go again, and dare I never come back?"

"Don't come back, please don't come back," she said almost childishly; "time will make no difference. O Graham! I am sorry."

"Don't be sorry for me," he said; "I shall not love you always without return; I am not abject. My love may have lived on meagre diet, which I was fool enough to fancy rich food; it will die of indifference; I can bear it." He was very white, and spoke hastily in a kind of choked voice.

"I cannot help it!" she almost sobbed.

"I don't mean to distress you. Say that I may come back in time; I can wait—years if you will—I don't want you to marry me now, nor ever unless you love me as I love you; give me a hope of that—only give me a hope of that."

"Graham," she said sadly, "I cannot; it seems—it is to me an impossibility."

"Then it is over indeed. What a delusion I have nursed!" he muttered.

There seemed nothing for him but to go, and he moved towards the door.

"Graham," she said with hesitation, and holding out her hand, "would you care to hear of us? I could still write, if you would not"—

"No; not now," he said. "If I can't have all, I must have nothing."

"Will you not stop and see grandmamma?"

He stood a moment at the open door. "Perhaps I had better—yes, I'll stay. If I don't she'll worry you about it after." He came back, took the newspaper, and buried himself behind it. He was in a maze—the hope of his life had vanished.

He heard a slight rustle; and when he looked up

Bessie was gone, and, what was an intolerable annoyance, in a few minutes Miss Dobbie appeared.

Miss Dobbie appeared to apologise for Mrs. Barclay. Mrs. Barclay was having her afternoon nap, and she thought it a pity to disturb her. She would not likely sleep long now, etc. etc.

"And how do you think dear Mrs. Grant is looking, Mr. Richardson? Not very well, I doubt. Queeny has had hooping-cough, and her mamma has made herself quite a slave, seldom or never leaving her. She is one of the most devoted of mothers."

"Is Queeny very ill?" Graham said shortly. He remembered with remorse that he had not even asked for her.

"Oh no; she has never been very ill, and she is nearly better, but is still kept in one room. I sometimes persuade her mamma to leave her in my charge. She is very unwilling, but I insist on it. It is such a beautiful thing a mother's love! I can quite sympathise with our dear Bessie. To think of her a widow! What a sweet young interesting widow she is, Mr. Richardson! A widow must be wrapped up in her child—her only child. Now Mrs. Barclay can't see



A naturalist needs only to see one bone of an animal to enable him to construct the entire skeleton; so, from this accidental glimpse, Graham saw, and comprehended at once, that the kernel of the old Berwick Street life was here, though enclosed in a much handsomer shell.

If Graham had a virtue, it was humility, and that is a heaven-born grace; but, humble as he was, he knew the love he offered Bessie was a thing worth taking—a thing worth her taking; and he pitied her—he pitied her and himself. He had not the wild tumult that had lashed him into brain-fever before—an identical experience never occurs; but it seemed as if his life had come to a stand. He sat quietly and talked to Miss Dobbie, or rather heard her talk, and played backgammon all the evening with Mrs. Barclay; and then, against the combined entreaty of those ladies, he took his departure.

CHAPTER LXIX.

It was a long time before he saw Bessie again. He made no effort to see her; and when he did meet her it was unexpectedly. He was in Eastburgh, and as usual went to Miss Grant's. He was always as welcome in her house as daylight. There he found Bessie and her child. Queeny was ailing, had been ailing for some time, and her mother was naturally pre-occupied about her. She met Graham with customary frankness, and no shade of constraint, and his pride served him well; for a day or two he acted the ordinary acquaintance with much success. Now and then he allowed himself to gaze on her face unnoticed; and once, when she left the room, he sighed deeply; so that Miss Grant said, cheerily—

“What's the matter, Graham? There's no mortality among your sheep, is there?”

“No. What made you ask that?”

“The way you were sighing. I thought you were oppressed with care.”

“Was I sighing? It was unconscious then.”

One morning he was in Miss Grant's sitting-room with Bessie and her daughter only. He had been trying to amuse the child, for he was sure she was recovering, and would soon be as well as ever; but failing in that, he had taken the newspaper. He did not read though; he was watching the anxious care Bessie was lavishing on her child, and the looks of deep love she shed upon her. He watched till an evil spirit took possession of him, and he suddenly said, “If she dies!” and laughed, not loud; but he laughed. Bessie looked up, and her great dark eyes flashed. The colour rushed to his face; and he rose and left the room without speaking. He went out into the street. “What a brute I have been!” he muttered, “to be jealous of a mother's love for her child. If I had the shadow of a chance it is gone now—gone!”

He could not go back to the house. He wrote to Miss Grant, saying he had to go home sooner than



he intended, and would not be able to see her before he left. To Bessie he wrote—

“Dear Mrs. Grant—I cannot explain the brutality of the speech I made to-day; I can only apologise for it. I do most humbly apologise for it.—I am, yours truly,
G. RICHARDSON.”

Bessie put down the note. “Poor Graham!” she said. Her anger had been only a momentary flash. She thought of him the whole day. Why had he said such a cruel thing? His laugh rang in her ear—a bitter laugh—altogether different from his usual laugh. The whole thing was so unlike him that she was driven up to the right theory of it.

“O Queeny,” she thought, “I was so absorbed in you that I did not show him the least attention—not the least—after all his long unwearied kindness.”

She would have written to him, but she remembered he had declined her letters.

Graham thought he had finished his cause by that speech. In point of fact, it had laid his first secure footing in her heart.

His grief and remorse were deepened, if possible, when, some months after, news came to him of Queeny's death. She died; she had only been four years in the world, and her death was a very unimportant thing to the world. Mrs. Ainslie said, "It would leave her mother wholly unshackled." It certainly did that.

What an awful pause there was in Bessie's life now! The little girl had wound her tendrils round the hearts of the Goldies, and grandmamma, and Miss Dobbie; and Bessie had the true and united sympathy she had missed so bitterly in her first terrible bereavement. Mrs. Goldie did not attempt consolation, or exhort to resignation as she had done before; she only wept with her, which was far better. Graham's heart bled for her, but he did not dare to write—the memory of that speech, which must have burned itself into her, prevented him. And Bessie wondered—many times wondered—why he said never a word.

"He loved Queeny; I'm sure he did," she would say to Miss Dobbie. "He never saw much of her, but she did not forget him. She sometimes asked me 'when Game would come again,'" and the poor mother's voice faltered.

“ Ah ! Mr. Richardson is a favourite with young and old,” said Miss Dobbie ; “ but he has given us up now, perhaps he has found a closer attraction nearer home.”

Time crept on, and the house grew accustomed to the stillness, but Bessie could not forget the clasp of the loving little arms. It was well with the child, that she knew ; but, oh, the desolation to her !

“ You know, Bessie, my dear,” said Miss Dobbie, “ I think you should go a little more into society than you do ; it is not natural for a young person to live so very quietly as you do ; or if you would take a change. Mrs. Goldie proposed you going to her for a little ”——

“ Yes, I’ll go,” said Bessie. “ Aunt will make me do something ; I shall be ashamed to be idle beside her ; but I’ll tell you what, Miss Dobbie, I’m going to Ironburgh first.”

“ A very good plan, if you don’t think old associations will be too much for you. I think you should go somewhere you’ve never been before, among people you’ve never seen before, and try to eat ”—— “ Something I’ve never eaten before,” continued Bessie. “ I

am going to see Mr. Dods. I am ashamed I have never seen him since we left Ironburgh, and if he is able I'll bring him back here with me."

"If your grandmamma approves."

"She approves. I spoke to her this morning."

Bessie went to Middleburgh that afternoon, stayed all night with the Goldies, and went to Ironburgh next day. Arrived at the station there, she drove direct to Berwick Street.

Graham Richardson was in Ironburgh on this day, and he too called at Berwick Street. This time the buxom niece welcomed him heartily, and opened on him in volume. "O sir," she said, "ye're just come in gude time; my uncle's been wearying to see ye; he's ta'en to his bed now for the best part o' a fortnight, and I doubt if he'll ever come out o't."

"Indeed," said Graham; "he doesn't suffer much, does he?"

"No, I think no; he never compleens; it's just weakness like. He's never been the same man since my auntie's death; and what vexes me, Mr. Richardson, is, though he's sae ill, and Mr. Pettigrew is as anxious as can be to see him now and then to gie

him a word in season—as wha's better qualified?—he just gangs daft if I sae muckle as hint at it. It's vexatious. Just this morning I said to him, 'Uncle, I fancy if ye was to keek in at the door o' heaven an' see Pettigrew there, ye wadna be for gaun in?' and what do you think he said?—he said, 'it wad be matter for consideration;' heard ye ever the like o' that?"

"If Mr. Dods doesn't want to see him, there's no use teasing him about it," said Graham, a little sharply.

"Teasing him, Mr. Richardson! it's a' for his gude."

"It will do him no good, better let him alone; will you ask if he will see me? I have no wish to thrust myself on him if he doesn't wish it."

"I daresay neither has Mr. Pettigrew—what interest o' his is it?" she asked, betraying the strain in her nature that fitted her to enjoy the lodger's company.

"Uncle," said the girl, "here's a friend you'll be glad to see."

The face was thinner and grayer than ever, and

the head was at rest on the pillow, the long neck relieved from its burden. He seemed comfortable enough, but had not the energy to move till he heard who his visitor was, then he turned round and held out his hand. Graham sat down beside him. "I'm glad to see ye, man," he said.

"But I'm sorry to see you—in bed I mean."

The old man's face worked as if suppressing some emotion. His niece went away, asking Graham to ring if they wanted anything.

"Ah, but you must get up again," said Graham, cheerily, "and get out for a walk. I see they are making great improvements near you; you must go out and look after them."

"Weel, I'm glad to hear it. I took a look at the papers this morning, and I was glad to see it for the sake o' other folk. I'll walk no more."

In his heart Graham felt that it was so, and he kept silence.

"It's a queer thing—a queer thing," said Mr. Dods, musingly, "that I am to be persecuted wi' that man Pettigrew to the last. I've been thinking a' morning o' what that lassie said; she said, 'What

would I do if I saw Pettigrew in heaven ?' Weel, I'm a great sinner—a great sinner ; but if I do meet him there, he'll be different, and I'll be different, and maybe we'll can compluther, although it's no easy seeing how it can be. But there's ae thing : Peter'll aye be for pushing ben, and I'll be mair than content just to be within the door, so we'll maybe no meet often. Ye mind what John Bunyan said when he saw the glory through the door as it opened and shut—' I wished I were among them ;' if I just were inside the door—inside the door."

" For Christ's sake," said Graham, softly.

" Ay, for Christ's sake—for Christ's sake," said the old man fervently. " Oh, for what ither sake could we hope to be there ?"

There was silence again ; Mr. Dods was the first to break it.

" I may no see you again, Mr. Richardson, and I may tell ye that I've left my books to Bessie—that's Mrs. Grant—she kens maist o' them already, and she'll tak' care o' them, I'm sure ; and I've left my manuscripts to you. If ye should ever think o' publishing them, ye'll find them a' in correct order, wi' a

preface, which I think will do wi' little if ony alteration. Some poets hae been little thocht o' till they were dead; whether that'll be my case or no, I dinna ken, or if it is, whether I'll be aware o't; onyway, there's naething in them I would be ashamed o' sittin' inside the door, if I'm there. Oh, to be there!" he said with energy, as if losing sight of his strongest earthly interests; "I pray to be there, for Christ's sake."

Once more there was silence for a time. Then he groped below his pillow, and took out some small thing wrapped in paper.

"This," he said, "is a bit brooch *she* used to wear; it's o' nae value—nae value whatever, but ye'll tak' it and gie't to Miss Barclay, that's Mrs. Goldie, in memory o' *her*."

It was at this moment that the door opened, and to Graham's astonishment, Bessie entered. He rose quickly, and she blushed very deeply when she saw him; he observed this, and felt at once that it was caused by the remembrance of that last time he had spoken to her. Having shaken hands with him, for the first time in her life with a species of constraint,

which he was aware of, and also construed as marking her deep feeling of displeasure, she took the thin-veined hand of Mr. Dods, and the old man looked in her face. "Bessie," he said, "this is kind."

"Don't say that, it seems a reproach; I ought to have been here long ago."

"Puir thing, puir thing!" he said, stroking her hand; "ye've had muckle o' your ain to bear." There was a pause; then she said, "I came from Middleburgh this morning, where aunt lives—Mrs. Goldie you know—she asked me to remember her most kindly to you. She and I thought you might return with me and pay us a visit."

"If I had been able—but I'll travel nae mair except the last journey." Then he wandered into old times, and spoke of his wife, and told Bessie of the trinket Mr. Richardson had to give to Mrs. Goldie, and that he had left her—Mrs. Grant—his books.

"Don't speak of that," she said, with the tears in her eyes; "much as I would value them, I hope you'll live to use them a long time yet."

"And I have left my poems to Mr. Richardson here," he went on saying to her. "You'll help him

to look them over if they're ever printed ; you and him'll meet a gey wheen auld friends among them." Then to change the subject, he said, "Ye'll mind Pettigrew, Bessie?"

She smiled. "Perfectly, Mr. Dods."

"Weel, Mr. Richardson," and he looked at Graham, "he was aye a great hand for collecting the news, and I understand he's heard that you are gaun to be married."

"Indeed !" said Graham.

"Yes ; and it's the best thing ye can do, if ye get a gude wife, and I think ye're fit to wale a gude ane ; and I wish you muckle joy."

"Thank you," said Graham.

"You are fatiguing yourself, Mr. Dods," said Bessie. "I think I must go now ; and I hope not to be long of being back."

"Fare ye weel then," said the old man.

She held out her hand to Graham. "I'll go with you to the foot of the stair," he said. Then, turning to Mr. Dods, "Take a rest now. I'll be up in the evening again."

She went down stairs before him. "There are

ghosts in this stair," she said. "I met one coming up—a shabbily-dressed child with white face and staring eyes; you were kind to her long ago."

"I met that ghost too," he said.

He handed her into the carriage, "Good-bye, Graham. I need not say that I wish you every happiness."

She said it in such a composed tone, that for the first time in his life he was set on edge by her.

"Thank you," he said drily. "Where shall I tell the man to drive?"

"To the station. I'm just going back to Middleburgh."

"You'll have some time to wait."

"It doesn't matter. I can wait at the station."

He shut the door, lifted his hat, and saw her drive off.

"She wishes me every happiness," he muttered bitterly. "Well, women can do and say things that I could not." Then his face darkened as he recalled his horrible speech to her when her child was ill. "But I," he thought, "was mad—mad at the moment—and she has all her senses."

Bessie had only driven away when she dropped her face into her hands and sobbed. "He would not always love me, he said, and it is over now," she murmured, and all the past came back on her—her long and intimate knowledge of him, his goodness, his loneliness; and she wondered if she were utterly selfish, that she had only waked into love and sympathy for him when she herself was left alone, and that now she should grudge him his happiness. She despised herself. "I am not worthy of him," she said, "or I would have felt all this sooner."

When she reached Middleburgh Villa, her aunt said, "Bessie, your journey has done you more ill than good. You shouldn't have gone and come the same day."

"It's not that, aunt—not the fatigue; but it was touching to see Mr. Dods as he is now. He has given Graham his wife's brooch to give you—you mind it. I declare there was such a raking-up of old feelings that I was glad to get out of the stair before I broke down. Graham happened to be there too, and Mr. Dods said he and I would arrange his poems together, if they were ever published. One

way and another I was so harassed. Had one not better let old feelings lie dormant, do you not think, aunt?"

"Yes, if recalling them unfits one for present duty; much better to let the dead bury their dead."

"If one could, aunt—if one only could! Yes, yes," she said humbly; "I'll do it, aunt; I would like to do it." She was turning over a basket of plain work on which Mrs. Goldie was in the habit of employing an hour or two of her day. "I'm toned down to sewing now; it takes a good deal of discipline to bring one to sewing."

Mr. Goldie laughed. "Does it?" he said; "I thought women took to sewing naturally?"

"Not I," said Bessie.

"Many a good woman has found much comfort in her needle," said Mrs. Goldie.

"Then I must take to it; it's my last resource," thought Bessie.

In the evening Graham found Mr. Dods much revived, for the time at least. In going out he met all the ghosts—the ghost of his own boyish happiness among them. Bessie was not alone in having her

feelings harrowed that day. As he stopped a moment in the stair, he involuntarily raised his hat as he thought of all the care, and toil, and anguish that had been under that roof. "How will it all look," he thought, "after we have met inside the door? May we all meet there!"

Next time he came to Berwick Street it was to attend the old man's funeral, and then these little houses passed to other inhabitants, to grow other crops of thrilling human interests in the little rooms that are always so thickly peopled.

CHAPTER LXX.

MONTHS after this Graham got a letter, addressed in a lady's writing—very beautiful writing it was—that he did not know. He wondered who on earth could be writing to him, or what any unknown lady could be writing about. With some little curiosity he tore it open, and at a glance he saw it was dated Blindpits, and signed "Jane Dobbie." Miss Dobbie wrote thus :—

"Dear Mr. Richardson—You will be surprised, no doubt, at getting a letter from me, although it is not so very surprising either, considering how very long we have been acquainted. You will be glad to learn that we are all well. Mr. and Mrs. Goldie were here yesterday; that has turned out an exceedingly happy marriage, and has gone far to remove my prejudices against unequal marriages, for unquestion-

ably Miss Barclay was the superior of Mr. Goldie in point of birth and education.

“ I have said we are all well ; let me correct myself, we are not *all quite* well. Our dear Bessie, I am sorry to say, is drooping ; not that she is ill exactly ; she won't allow that. I think she requires change of society, and air, and scene—a thorough and complete change. I try to get her to go more into society here than she does, but she is very averse to it. Now, I don't know whether you are married yet or not, but if not, I believe that interesting event will take place very soon. Now, my plan is, that you and your young, and I do not doubt lovely wife should pay us a visit here ; it would rouse and amuse her ; or, failing that, could you not invite her to be your guest for a time, which in some respects might be even better ? You will tell your wife Bessie's very interesting history, and I am sure she will join us in doing our utmost for her ; it is very touching to see so young a creature drooping like a flower with a worm at its root. I trust I have made my meaning sufficiently clear ; and with very best

wishes for you and your bride, I am, dear Mr. Richardson, yours most sincerely, JANE DOBBIE."

Graham mused over this letter, it vexed him, but what could he do? What he did immediately was to answer it. He wrote,—

"Kingshope, Southburgh, 19th June 18—.

"Dear Miss Dobbie—I am much obliged by your letter. You have fallen into a mistake about me. I am neither married nor going to be, so that my wife can't visit you neither can she receive Mrs. Grant here.

"The house I live in would hardly accommodate ladies; I preferred staying in it, even after my new house was ready, and there is a tenant in the new house just now who has a lease of it, two years of which are yet to run. But if Mrs. Grant wishes to visit here, I could look out accommodation for her in the neighbourhood. I am very sorry indeed to hear that she is not in such good health as could be wished. *20th June*.—I went up to my tenant this morning to see what he would say about leaving the house. He doesn't seem very willing, especially as the 12th of August is

instructions, I am, yours truly,

“ G. RICHARDSON.”

The answer he got was this—

“ Dear Graham—I must have written to you long ago if you had not told me not to do so. I have never forgotten that, but I can't help writing now. Miss Dobbie has shown me a letter of yours. I don't know what nonsense she has been writing about me. I am quite well, and I don't want to visit your neighbourhood. The idea of turning out your tenant is too absurd. Please think no more about it.

“ I ought to be sorry that you are not going to be married ; but if I were to say so, I would say what is not true ; I am very glad ; if you were happily married you would be lost to us, you know. This is very selfish I know. Grandmamma asks me to remember her to you, and with very kind regards, I am, yours truly,

“ BESSIE GRANT.”

His answer was—

"Dear Bessie—I have been all day trying to interpret your letter. At one time it would have been enough for me to build a fair castle on, but I am wiser now ; I dare not build except on a secure foundation. Perhaps I am a fool once more in supposing there is anything in it. You know what I mean. Will you write again and ask me to come ? —I am, yours ever truly, G. RICHARDSON."

As soon as a letter could come, it came. His hand trembled as he opened it.

"Dear Graham—We are all very glad to know that you think of visiting us—especially grandmamma. Miss Dobbie desires me to give you her compliments.—I am, yours truly, BESSIE GRANT."

The blood stole to his face, and a smile, eloquent of happiness, broke over it—his face became happiness well.

"Especially grandmamma," he murmured, "that's her, herself as she was before"—and he leaned his head on the mantelpiece, and stood still for a long time. At last he moved, "Well, now that I have

He was at Blindpits next forenoon. The ladies had dispersed to their morning occupations, and the room he was shown into was empty. When the servant took his card to Bessie, she started. "So early," she thought, "how has he managed it?" She ran down stairs, but stopped a moment in the passage; he was standing on the hearth watching the door. She went in; he met her. "Bessie!" he said. She did not speak; neither spoke for a time. It was enough.

"I expected to see your grandmamma come in. Why didn't you send her to me?"

"It did not occur to me."

"It's a wonder it didn't. Now, then, what are we to do? I can't turn that man out of my house without making an enemy for life"——

"Don't do that."

"What shall we do then? To be sure we can get a house anywhere, or we can go abroad for a time"——

"No, not abroad," she said quickly.

"What do you wish? Perhaps you would prefer to wait two years, and then go comfortably and rationally into our own house?"

She looked at him. "Would you prefer that?"

"No; would you?"

"O no!" she said; "no."

"Why, I thought that would be exactly what you would propose. You are astonishingly reasonable."

"Ah, you did not hang the terror of losing you over my head so long for nothing!"

"Bessie!"

"That day in Ironburgh, when Mr. Dods wished you happiness, and I did, you never put us right—it was cruel."

"You did it with such remarkable coolness, Bessie, that I was exasperated."

"What it cost me to do it! What it cost me!"

"I did not know. How could I know? I thought it did not matter a straw to you whether it was true or not."

"Graham!"

Graham did not trust himself to speak for a little,

then he went back on the less moving theme. "But we haven't settled what we're to do."

"I'll tell you what I would like to do—go with you to the house you live in now."

"I doubt that would hardly do."

"Why not? Ladies live in huts at the Antipodes, why not try it here? I believe it's a very good house."

"Good what's of it; but there's only three rooms and a kitchen."

"That would hold me, surely?"

"It might hold you, as you're not very big; but I don't see how it would hold your clothes."

"I haven't many—you would be surprised how few I have; and I could leave most of them here. I really don't need them."

"What would Mrs. Goldie say?"

"She must think we're old enough now to do as we like."

"What would people say?"

"I don't mind people."

"Neither do I."

"I've pictured that place so often, I would like to be there with you."

"It will be a strange transformation. I'll need the evidence of all my senses to believe it."

"You'll let me come with you, then?"

"Yes; I think on the whole I'll permit you. You can try it. It's a very retired situation for a young lady whose aim at one time was the boards and the footlights."

"Don't invent stories."

"I'm only recalling."

"With a difference."

"When shall we go?"

"When you like."

"That will be very soon."

And they went.

THE END.

